

تَرْجُمَةُ
عِلْمِ
الْجَدِّ اَهْلِ الْاَيْمَنِ
عَنْ
اَكْبَرِ اَيَّتِهَا
اَسْمَاءِ

The Family of the Prophet

An Exegetical Study of the Verse of Purification

DR. M.H. JAFFER
FOREWORD BY SHAYKH AZHAR NASSER

The Verse of Purification (āyah al-taṭhīr), Sūrah Aḥzāb verse 33, is likely one of the most controversial theological verses in the history of Islam. Namely, the dispute has centered around this key question: who are the "People of the House" (Ahl al-Bayt) mentioned in this verse and what is God specifically saying about them? In this research, we have sought to present the various views espoused by commentators regarding this question while weighing the lexical, semantic, contextual, and traditionist (ḥadīth) corroborators. We demonstrate that all the evidence points towards these individuals being none other than the Holy Imams of the Prophetic lineage; in turn, this verse serves to substantiate their infallibility. After presenting this answer to this question, we endeavor to present and refute the myriad contentions often raised by critics against this thesis. This book is the first of its kind in the English language, extensively citing dozens of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu resources. We pray it may be beneficial to those who seek a deeper Qurānic-based understanding about the identity of the Ahl al-Bayt and their status in Islam.



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Dr. M.H. Jaffer

Foreword by Shaykh Azhar Nasser

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The Family of the Prophet: An Exegetical Study of the Verse of
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Written by Dr. M.H. Jaffer

Edited by Arifa Hudda

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admin@tasneeminstitute.org

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Foreword

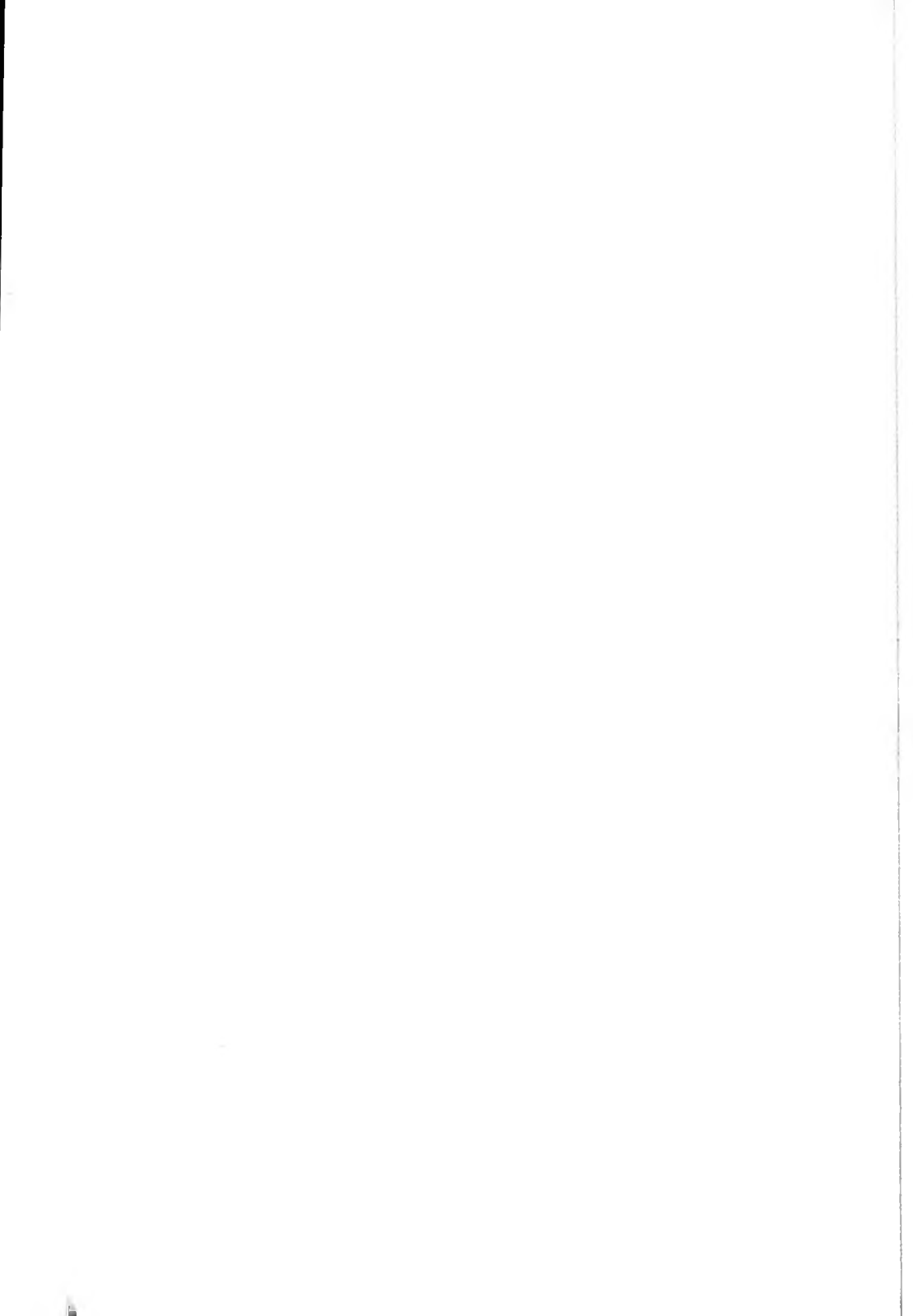
The Qurān is an endless ocean of spiritual secrets and moral lessons. For over a millennia, Muslim scholars and thinkers from all theological persuasions have produced works that explore the various aspects and dimensions of the Qurān. Some have contributed voluminous commentaries covering the totality of its chapters, while others have provided detailed analyses of single chapters, and in some cases, individual verses.

The book before you is an exegetical study of one of the most contentious verses in the Qurān, generating centuries of rich debate and dialogue. The Verse of Purification, as it is popularly known, represents a significant diverging point between Shī'ah and Sunnī Muslims.

While both schools express deep reverence for the Ahl al-Bayt ﷺ, there is much dispute regarding the identity of its members and their role in the spiritual and political lives of Muslims.

I had the opportunity to review the manuscript of, *The Family of the Prophet: An Exegetical Study of The Verse of Purification*, and it delights me to say that, to date, it is the most thorough treatment of this Qurānic verse available in the English language. I commend the author for his meticulous research, and I pray that readers find this work instructional and enlightening. May Allah ﷻ continually bless all of those who contributed to the completion of this work and may we all strive to be perpetual students of the Qurān.

Shaykh Azhar Nasser
Founder of Tasneem Institute
October 8th, 2022



Introduction

الحمد لله ربّ البريات

ثم نصلي على محمد أفضل الصلوات

وعلى آله الكرام سفينة النجاة

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the creations.

And upon Muḥammad be the best of salutations,

And upon his Noble Household, the Ship of Salvation.

There is little doubt that the Verse of Purification [*Āyah al-Taṭhīr* - *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* (33), verse 33] is considered among the doctrinal verses for the Shī'ah. Since the inception of this creed until today, it is recited in nearly every one of our sermons (*khuṭbahs*) and is featured prominently in the various supplications from our immaculate Imāms ﷺ.

While the Shī'ah almost unanimously take this verse to imply the immaculate purification and infallibility of the noble Five Personalities (*Aṣḥāb al-Kisā'*), and by extension the other nine Imāms from the progeny of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, many of our brethren from the Ahl al-Sunnah do not take this verse to mean as such.

Naturally, this has resulted in a very extensive exegetical discussion between the Shī'ah and Ahl al-Sunnah about the importance of this verse. While this verse (*āyah*) has already been subjected to exhaustive analysis within the Shī'ah scholarly circles in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu languages, it is unfortunate that a thorough analysis of this verse is lacking in the English language.

Of course, there have been admirable, albeit incomplete, initiatives carried out by the likes of the late Sayyid Akhtar Rizvi and Shaykh Mansour Leghaei, may Allah reward them both. The translation of some of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* by the great 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī has been a milestone as well; however, the wide-

reaching nature of his work prevented the respected 'Allāmah from a thorough exposition of this verse as one may have desired.

Among Sunnī polemicists, this relative vacuum has been seized upon to cast aspersions and contentions against the Shī'ah interpretation of this verse. In the wake of this influence, it occurred to me that a proper understanding of this verse was sorely lacking, even among some of our very well-learned Shī'ah constituents. This was further reinforced to me when I discovered that some of our own people had inadvertently come to acknowledge that the purification mentioned in this verse subsumes the wives of the Prophet! This was naturally very alarming, especially given that this verse is a credal text used to substantiate our theological tenets.

After encountering this trend, I thought it was necessary for me to first obtain personal conviction regarding the validity of the Shī'ah interpretation for myself; therefore, I sought to research this verse over the course of a month, taking copious notes and attempting to assimilate the various research endeavours of our impeccable scholars, may Allah reward them generously. In this process, I attempted to pay special attention to the contentions raised by our Sunnī brethren about the Shī'ah interpretation of this verse and searched for answers as to how they should be addressed.

It was only after obtaining this personal satisfaction in understanding the verse that I decided to transcribe these thoughts; and I realized it would indeed be amiss for me to not consolidate the various efforts already expended by our Shī'ah '*ulamā*' and present it as a cogent thesis for the English-speaking audience.

Thus, what you find before you - dear readers - is my humble effort in attempting to present the conclusions of my research. We have employed a two-pronged approach, whereby in the first section we set out to establish a robust understanding of the verse. In doing so, we adopted a traditional exegetical approach

employed by many of the great commentators (*mufasssirūn*) whereby one examines the verse at the level of its lexicon, then its syntax, then its context clues within the Qurān, and finally extra-textual clues derived from the traditionist (*ḥadīth*) corpus. After reading this analysis with deep reflection, the esteemed reader will find the second part of the analysis, which contains a detailed treatment of the various contentions raised against the significance of this verse.

We would like to make two observations here: first of all, although we do not claim that our analysis is exhaustive, we have endeavoured to the extent of our abilities to subsume as much of the detailed research as we could. Of course, any shortcomings in the analysis and presentation are completely my own. Secondly, the nature of this topic does lend itself to a polemical overtone, although this is not at all our intention; rather, we hope that the preponderance of evidence presented will convince any truth-seeking reader that our thesis is correct, regardless of what sect one adheres to.

We hope that this book will serve to strengthen the beliefs (*‘aqīdah*) of our youth and pave the way for future initiatives in this vein.

I would like to acknowledge my family, especially my wife Fatemah and my mother Latifa, who supported me in this project as I spent many hours in research and writing.

I would furthermore like to thank Sayyid Ali Imran, a great friend who assisted in publicizing this work to a wider audience.

Finally, I would also like to thank *Tasneem Institute* for their assistance in publishing this booklet.

We sincerely hope that Allah ﷻ accepts our humble effort expended in the cause of defending His creed and elucidating the status and position of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ﷺ. Finally, we dedicate this writing to the Imām of our Age, Imām al-Mahdī ﷺ, and make us from among his helpers upon his return.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الْعَزِيزُ مَسَّنَا وَأَهْلَنَا الضُّرُّ وَجِئْنَا بِبِضْعَةٍ مُرَجَّنَةٍ فَأَوْفِ لَنَا الْكَيْلَ
وَتَصَدَّقْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَجْزِي الْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ﴾

O the most noble! We and our family have been struck with afflictions, and have come to you with a few worthless provisions; so, grant us full measure and be charitable to us. Indeed, Allah rewards the charitable ones! (Sūrah Yūsuf (12), verse 88)

﴿وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أُنِيبُ﴾

And my success is through none other than Allah, upon Him I trust, and to Him I turn. (Sūrah Hūd (11), verse 88)

Dr. M.H. Jaffer

July 9th, 2022

10th of Dhūl Hijjah, 1443 AH

1

An In-Depth Analysis of *Āyah al-Taḥīr*: Who are the *Ahl al-Bayt*?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate

Allah ﷻ says in the Noble Qurān:

﴿وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ ۖ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَأَتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ ۚ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ
أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا﴾

And abide (O wives of the Prophet) quietly in your homes, and do not flaunt your charms as they used to flaunt them in the Days of Ignorance; and be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto Allah and His Apostle: **for Allah only wants to remove from you all that might be loathsome, O *Ahl al-Bayt* (People of the**

Household), and to purify you with an utmost purity.¹
 (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), verse 33)

Among the most disputed verses of the Qurān is the ending portion of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, verse 33, known colloquially as the “Verse of Purification” (*Āyah al-Taṭhīr*).² This verse has been a cause of dispute among the Shī’ahs and Sunnīs, specifically regarding who the “*Ahl al-Bayt*” (People of the Household) are that are mentioned in this verse. In general, the commentators of the Qurān have diverged about the meaning of *Ahl al-Bayt*, and these can be divided into three major camps:

1. The *Ahl al-Bayt* is a term which includes the wives, the Five Personalities (those whom the Prophet ﷺ gathered under the cloak, namely himself, Imām ‘Alī ؑ, Imām Ḥasan ؑ, Imām Ḥusayn ؑ, and Lady Fāṭima ؑ), and the Banū Hāshim.^{3,4}

¹ We have adopted the translation of Muḥammad Asad for this verse for the sake of clarity for an English-speaking audience, although we will examine the verse in detail in the coming sections.

² Although the term *āyah* (verse) is used for the ending portion of Chapter 33, verse 33, the reader will observe that it is technically only a fragment of the verse in the actual writing (*muṣṣhaf*). Nonetheless, it is popularly referred to as the Verse of Purification (*Āyah al-Taṭhīr*), and we have therefore adopted this convention in this article.

³ ‘Ikrimah al-Barbarī and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān are known to have endorsed that the term *Ahl al-Bayt* only subsumes the wives of the Prophet. Many Sunnī scholars are of the opinion that the term *Ahl al-Bayt* incorporates the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, as well as the Five Personalities, although explicit textual evidence for this viewpoint does not exist among the early generations of Muslims (one of the first commentators (*mufasssīrīn*) of the Qurān to propose this was al-Fakhr al-Rāzī in his commentary *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* on this verse).

⁴ Among the Shī’ah scholars, Āyatullāh Ṣāleḥī Najafābādī controversially took the position that this Verse of *Taṭhīr* includes both the wives, and the Five Personalities in his work *Ta’ammuli dar Āye-ye-Taṭhīr*. He

2. The *Ahl al-Bayt* is a term which includes all of relatives of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ from the Banū Hāshim for whom charity (*ṣadaqah*) was prohibited.⁵

3. The *Ahl al-Bayt* is a term which is specific for the Five Personalities along with the remaining Shī'ah Imāms.⁶

In the following book, we would like to examine the Verse of Purification as exhaustively as possible to arrive at the viewpoint which is the most consistent with evidence. We will endeavour to:

1. Examine the import of the words used.
2. Discuss syntactic features of this verse and their connotations.
3. Discuss the verse in context (i.e. *al-qarā'in al-dākhiliyyah*).
4. Delve into the historical and narrational reports (i.e. *al-qarā'in al-khārijīyyah*) in order to derive to a conclusion.

Then, we will analyze and refute several prominent contentions/counterarguments to the views that we will present. As far as we are aware, an exhaustive analysis of the Verse of Purification to the extent that we endeavour to present has not

received a scathing critique for this work from many prominent Shī'ah scholars, one of them being Āyatullah Ṣādeqī Tehrānī.

⁵ This opinion was particularly attributed to Zayd ibn Arqam that we will discuss later.

⁶ The opinion that the term *Ahl al-Bayt* is specific for the Five Personalities was attributed to Umm Salamah, Wāthilah ibn Asqa', 'Ā'ishah, and Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī. The Shī'ah commentators are almost unanimous on this term being specific for these Five, and several prominent Sunnī scholars also agree with this (Abū Ja'far al-Ṭahāwī, 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Samhūdī, Yūsuf ibn Mūsā al-Ḥanafī, etc). There are also traditions (*riwāyāt*) that the Shī'ah scholars adhere to which include all the Twelve Shī'ah Imāms in the term *Ahl al-Bayt*.

been done to date in the English language.⁷ In this article, I am highly indebted to the excellent works of Sayyid Ja'far Murtaḍā al-‘Āmili, and Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Alī Muwaḥḥid al-Abṭāḥī (may Allah have mercy on both of them) in regard to the Verse of Purification (*Āyah al-Taṭhīr*).⁸

A Lexical Discussion Analyzing the Meaning of the Words⁹

First off, we would like to present a word-by-word breakdown of the root meanings in this Verse of Purification as follows:

إِنَّمَا (*Innamā*)

This is an Arabic particle composed of اِنْ and مَّا which implies 'exclusivization' (*al-ḥaṣr*). In other words, it is a word which enters upon either a verbal sentence (*jumlah al-fi'liyyah*), or a nominal sentence (*jumlah al-ismiyyah*) and has the primary role of affirming the word that follows it to the exclusion of all other possibilities.

يُرِيدُ اللّٰهُ (*Yurīdu Allahu*)

⁷ There have been some great explanations on this Verse (such as the one presented by Shaykh Manṣūr Leghaei entitled: *A Discourse on Āyah al-Taṭhīr*, although this was apparently a transcript of a lecture he gave, and thus took the form of a very rough note-like format), but they have left a lot to be desired. Owing to the importance of this Verse in Shī'ah theology, we have aimed to present a more exhaustive analysis here.

⁸ Al-‘Āmili's work is entitled *Ahl al-Bayt fī Āyat al-Taṭhīr* (The People of the House in the Verse of Purification) and al-Abṭāḥī's work is called *Āyat al-Taṭhīr fī Aḥādīth al-Farīqayn* (The Verse of Purification in the Narrations of the Two Sects).

⁹ The analysis that we exposit here is derived from the famous Qurānic dictionary *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurān* (Regarding the Words Specific to the Qurān) of Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī.

This word in its root (*al-irādah*) implies 'a faculty that is comprised of desire, want, and hope - an inclination of the soul towards something.' This inclination could be an unactualized desire (*al-mabda'i*), or an actualized decree (*al-muntahā*). When Allah is the Doer (*al-Fā'il*), it means that He has ordained or judged for something to be a certain way - for Allah obviously transcends unactualized inclinations.¹⁰

يُذْهِبُ عَنْ (*Yudhhiba 'An*)

A verb which is in the *أفعل* form (pattern IV) that means 'to make something go away from someone.' This word has a subtle connotation of the fact that the doer removes the object without accompanying it oneself (i.e., without *istiṣhāb*).¹¹ The Arabic particle *عن* ('*an*') is used to imply 'transcendence' (*al-mujāwazah*).

الرُّجُسُ (*Al-Rijs*)

This word is used to imply 'every type of uncleanness' and includes innate filth (*ṭab'i*), rational filth (*'aqlī*), and religiously deemed filth (*shar'i*). Additionally, it can also be abstracted to mean Divine punishment, as well as religious doubts.¹² In conjunction

¹⁰ As evidenced by Qurān, Sūrah Yāsīn (36), verse 82:

﴿إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ﴾

His (Allāh's) command when He ordains something is only to say to it 'Be' and it is.

¹¹ This contrasts with the phrase *ذهب به* - "to go away with something" - which implies that the doer leaves with the object. An example of this can be seen in Qurān, Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), verse 17, where Allah states that: "Allah takes away their light" from the disbelievers *ذهب الله بنورهم*. This implies that light accompanies Allah.

¹² Such as in the respective statements of Prophet Hūd عليه السلام to his people in Qurān, Sūrah al-A'rāf (7), verse 71:

﴿قَدْ وَقَعَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ رِجْسٌ وَعَصَبٌ﴾

with the preceding verb, there is a powerful personification being used here in this verse, as though filth is an individual being chased away.

أَهْلُ الْبَيْتِ (*Ahl al-Bayt*)

The word "*ahl*" means 'those with whom one is together,' whether this connection be one of kinship, religion, or locality; nonetheless, the root meaning is 'a connection of kinship.' The root meaning of "*bayt*" is 'a shelter that is sought by night,' although it was then abstracted by usage to mean 'a dwelling,' and then even further to mean 'a place' in general. In this phrase, we find the term being used in a possessive (*idāfah*) construction meaning more literally: "The people of the house (brought together)." As we will discuss later, this phrase should not be understood on the level of superficial meaning only, it is a specialized Qurānic expression (*al-iṣṭilāḥ*).

تَطْهِيرٌ (*Taṭhīr*)

This word is a فَعْل (form II) derived verbal noun from the root word (*maṣḍar*) of purity (*tahārah*). The import of *tahārah* is two-fold, and based on the context it could imply:

1. External cleanliness of the body, whether in a physical, or ritual sense; and/or
2. Spiritual/moral cleanliness.

Taṭhīr has a transitive meaning as a verbal noun, and thus implies the "process of purification."

Punishment and wrath have already descended upon you from your Lord.

As well, Allāh mentions about the disbelievers in Qurān, Sūrah al-Tawbah (9), verse 125:

﴿وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَتْهُمْ رِجْسًا إِلَىٰ رِجْسِهِمْ﴾

But as for those in whose hearts is a disease, it has (only) increased them in doubt upon their doubt.

Understanding the Syntax

After discussing the meaning of the words individually, the next step in understanding the Verse of Purification is to examine the words in conjunction with those which they govern and their grammatical function. It is recommended that the reader has the verse in front of them when reading this portion to better understand the grammatical points being conveyed.

Exclusivization (*Al-Ḥaṣr*)

The sentence here, as was mentioned starts with “*innamā*,” which implies that there is **only one single reason** for Allah’s ordinance (*irādah*). It should be noted that the verb which it governs is in the **present** tense يُرِيدُ which indicates ‘persistence’ (*al-istimrāriyyah*), meaning that Allah’s ordinance is for one reason, and it remains persistent, it is not attached to a specific timeframe.

The Particle of Causation (*Lām al-Ta’līl*)

The letter *lām* in يَذْهَبُ is known as the ‘particle which expresses purpose.’ Therefore, the implication is that everything which comes **after** this particle (i.e., to purify the *Ahl al-Bayt* from filth, and completely purify them) is the purpose of Allah’s ordinance (*irādah*). The ordinance which Allah has decreed is therefore left implied by what came before in this verse: namely, the various orders and prohibitions given to the women. Therefore, the implication is that: “Allah only decrees (these commands and prohibitions on the wives) in order to repel from you filth, O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and purify you completely.”

This is of course a significant difference from the common translation, which is that “Allah only desires to repel from you filth, O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and completely purify you.” This translation is blatantly incorrect. It would only be correct had the verse used the

non-adverbial infinitive particle **أَنْ** - in lieu of *lām*.¹³ Therefore, the use of *lām* is very important here: **It serves to indicate that the purification of the Ahl al-Bayt is the purpose of Allah's ordinances upon the wives.**¹⁴

Precedence of the Preposition (*Taqdīm al-Jārr wa al-Majrūr*)

It should be noted that **عَنْكُمْ** - *ankum* - comes **before** the object **الرِّجْسَ** - *al-rijs* - here, which is opposite to the default order. Normally in Arabic, the object **الرِّجْسَ** should precede the preposition **عَنْكُمْ**. This indicates a special degree of Divine attention, exclusivity, and prioritization of the party from whom all filth is being negated. The particle **عَنْ** ('*an*) instead of **مِنْ** (*min*) is used, which is also significant: the former is used for transcendence (*al-mujāwazah*), while the latter is used to indicate origination (*ibtidā' li al-ghāyah*). In other words, if **مِنْ** was used here, the meaning would be that 'filth was initially attached to the Ahl al-Bayt and was then driven away (*al-raḥf*).' However, the use of **عَنْ** suggests the possibility that filth was never attached to the Ahl al-Bayt to begin with; it has the meaning of deflection (*al-daf*).

This is extremely significant because it points towards the fact that filth has never been attached to those being addressed in this

¹³ In Arabic, this type of particle is known as "*an al-maṣdariyyah*," which taken together with the verb that comes after it has the syntactic significance of the verbal noun.

¹⁴ This is an important discussion which should be pursued in the books of Arabic grammar, as it is quite difficult to fully exposit in English. For advanced readers, please review al-Āmilī's *Ahl al-Bayt fī Āyat al-Taṭhīr*, Pp. 65-69.

verse. This is an important syntactic clue which serves to indicate infallibility.¹⁵

The Definite Article of Categorical Inclusion (*Lām al-Istighrāq*)

"*Rijs*" here is attached to "*al*" (the definite article), and this word is thus used for the purposes of categorical inclusion (*al-istighrāq*) meaning a complete subsumption of all forms of filth. Therefore, *al-rijs* is being categorically implied, and all the forms of repugnance (innate, rational, and religious) are being absolutely negated by Allah in bearing any connection to the addressees. In addition, this word also includes the secondary indications of the word *al-rijs*, such as Divine punishment and doubt, as we discussed in our lexical discussion.

The Definite Article of Recognition (*Lām al-ʿAhd*)

The definite article "*al*" which is used in "*al-bayt*" is used in Arabic to specify a house that is already known to the listeners (*al-ʿahd*) either because they know of it externally (*al-ʿahd al-khārijī*), or because it was mentioned earlier in the discussion (*al-ʿahd al-madhkūr*). Therefore, there are two possibilities here: Either "*al-bayt*" is a reference to Umm Salamah's house (*bayt al-saknā*) where the Five Personalities were dwelling when this Verse of *Taḥīr* was revealed, or it refers to the Prophetic house (*bayt al-nubuwwah wa*

¹⁵ As we will discuss more later, this is an important word to suggest that the wives were excluded, because they had certainly been touched by filth - either before their marriage to the Prophet ﷺ or afterwards (consider the Verses of Sūrah al-Taḥrīm against ʿĀʾishah and Hafṣah, as well as ʿĀʾishah's revolt against Imām ʿAlī رضي الله عنه, who was the Caliph of the nation at that time).

al-risālah).¹⁶ This is another important contextual clue, as it indicates that the “people of the house” (*ahl al-bayt*) is ‘a specialized expression with a specific meaning,’ as we will see later on when we discuss the narrations on this topic.

Accusative Particularization vs. the Vocative

Accusative (*Ikhtiṣās* vs. *al-Nidāʾ*)

The word “*ahl al-bayt*” is in the accusative case in this verse,¹⁷ and there is a difference of opinion regarding why that is. The first opinion is that it is a case of particularization (*al-ikhtiṣās*) whereby there is an implied (*muqaddar*) verb اَنْيى to the effect of “(I mean) the People of the House.” This is often done in the Qurān for the purpose of praise.¹⁸ The second opinion is that there is an implied ؤ (the vocative particle) meaning “(O) People of the House.” In either case, the purpose of this syntactical construction is to make it clear that a **specific group** is being referenced, and to make it clear that they are **worthy of laudation**.

The Cognate Accusative of Emphasis (*Al-Mafʿūl al-Muṭlaq*)

The verse ends with a special construction called a cognate accusative (*al-mafʿūl al-muṭlaq*) which is used for emphasis; in English, it would be best rendered as “and purify you with (an

¹⁶ If “*al-bayt*” here is taken to mean ‘the place of dwelling,’ then this is in reference to the occasion of revelation for the Verse of Purification (*al-ʾahd al-khārijī*); but if “*al-bayt*” is taken to mean ‘the Prophetic house,’ then this is in reference to the fact that the Prophet had already been mentioned earlier in the passage (*al-ʾahd al-madhkūr*).

¹⁷ In other words, there is a *fathah* on the word ‘*ahl*’ (i.e., it is *manṣūb*).

¹⁸ A very detailed discussion about this syntactic phenomenon can be found in the book *Maʾānī al-Naḥw*, by Dr. Fāḍil al-Sāmarrāʾī, Vol. 2, Pg. 118.

utmost or thorough) purification.” This categorical construction indicates purification on all levels: physical, mental, and spiritual. It is as if what is being said is that after repelling all the filth from you, O *Ahl al-Bayt*, Allah is bestowing you with the epitome of purity.

From the above analysis thus far, it becomes clear that this verse is specifically meant for the purpose of immense praise (*al-madh*); its construction therefore lies in the face of the previous verses wherein there is rebuke or admonishment towards piety. Rather, a careful reader should note that an endorsement of infallibility is quite plausible here, especially based on how the syntax is constructed.¹⁹

What do the Contextual Clues Imply?

After discussing the verse from a linguistic and syntactical standpoint, we have laid the groundwork to begin discussing the verse from a contextual point of view. It should be said that many commentators of the *Qurān* believe that the apparent reading of verse 33 of *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* (33) in its entirety supports the view that the referents in this Verse of Purification include the wives of the Prophet; in doing so, they rely upon a notion derived from the Islamic Jurisprudence known as “*ḥujjiyah al-ẓuhūr*” (the probativity of the apparent meaning).²⁰ In other words, they say that the fact this verse came during a series of commandments and prohibitions to the wives supports that it is inclusive of them.

We will examine this contention in-depth later in our discussion; however, for now, let us review the *Qurānic* contextual clues (*al-qarā'in al-dākhiliyyah*) on the backdrop of what the previous linguistic analysis of the verse already revealed. We will

¹⁹ We will discuss the contentions raised by some critics about this later in our discussion.

²⁰ That is, the *prima facie* meaning has evidentiary import.

proceed with our contextual observations on three levels: firstly, from within the same verse; secondly, from within the same passage; thirdly, from within the same chapter and other Qurānic verses.

A. Within the Same Verses

Initially, we will post some English translations as adapted from Muḥammad Asad, with slight corrections based on the above linguistic analysis; this will facilitate the contextual discussion for the reader:

﴿وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَاتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ
أَهْلَ النَّبِيِّ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا﴾

And abide (O wives of the Prophet) quietly in your homes, and do not flaunt your charms as they used to flaunt them in the Days of Ignorance; and be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed to Allah and His Apostle: **for Allah only ordains (these commands to the wives) in order to remove from you all that is repugnant, O *Ahl al-Bayt* (People of the Household), and to purify you with (utmost) purity.** (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), verse 33)

﴿وَاذْكُرْنَ مَا يُتْلَىٰ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ
لَطِيفًا خَبِيرًا﴾

And bear in mind all that is recited in your homes of Allah's messages and [His] Wisdom: **for Allah is Unfathomable [in His Wisdom], All-Aware.** (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), verse 34)

The Parenthetical Sentence (*Al-Jumlah al-Mu'taridah*)

When a person observes verse 33 of *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* (33), and then verse 34 directly afterwards, it is clear some of the wives of the Prophet were being rebuked and commanded to adhere to Allah's orders in no flattering language. This observation has been noted by 'Allāmah Majlisī when he says:

ان مخاطبة الزوجات مشوبة بالمعاقبة والتأنيب والتهديد، ومخاطبة أهل البيت
عليه السلام محلاة بأنواع التلطف والمبالغة في الاكرام ولا يخفى بعد إمعان النظر
المباينة التامة في السياق بينها وبين ما قبلها وما بعدها على ذوي الأفهام

The address to the wives is mixed with rebuke, repudiation, and admonishment, whereas the address to the *Ahl al-Bayt* ﷺ is couched in various forms of (Divine) favour and laudation. It will not be lost on those imbued with insight that there must be a clear contextual difference between this portion of the verse and what preceded it.²¹

Therefore, it is more apparent that the Verse of *Taḥīr* occurs as a parenthetical sentence amidst the caveats being issued to the wives. It is as if Allah is turning away from the wives for a moment to issue a high form of laudation to a specific group, then returning to admonish them once again. However, this does not mean that the laudation of the *Ahl al-Bayt* has occurred out of context. Rather, one of the reasons why Allah is ordaining these commands and prohibitions to the wives of the Prophet ﷺ is to protect this special group - the Prophetic Household - from being maligned through association with them. We will expand upon this point later.

²¹ *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 35, Pg. 235.

Prescriptive Will vs. Existential Will (*Irādah al-Tashrī'īyyah wa Irādah al-Takwīniyyah*)

There is a long discussion between the commentators of the Qurān and various scholars regarding whether the Divine Ordinance (*irādah*) mentioned explicitly in this verse is existential (*takwīniyyah*) or prescriptive (*tashrī'īyyah*).²² Many commentators fall into a grave mistake while analyzing this verse.²³ As discussed in the previous sections, the Divine ordinance mentioned in this verse is specifically tied to the commandments and prohibitions given to the wives of the Prophet ﷺ (i.e. *tashrī'īyyah*). In other words, Allah only ordained these religious prescriptions and expectations upon the wives; however, what was the reason for this?

The answer comes in the remainder of verse 33, whereby Allah ﷻ states that the reason for this prescription on the wives is because He has ordained that the *Ahl al-Bayt* should remain utterly purified and completely removed of all filth. As per the Principle of Implicit Understanding (*Maḥmūd al-Muwāfaqah*), there is a second implied Divine ordinance being mentioned in this clause which is existential (*takwīnī*), implied by the fact that the agent-doer (*al-fā'il*) of the verbs 'to remove' (*yudhhibu*) and 'to purify you' (*yutahhirakum*) is Allah ﷻ Himself. In other words, Allah's ﷻ ordinances upon the wives are derived from an existential ordinance that the *Ahl al-Bayt* should be devoid of all filth. More directly, it is as if the verse is saying: "Allah has only prescribed these commandments and prohibitions on the wives (because of

²² In theology, Allah's ordinances are divided into two types: The first type is known as an existential (*takwīniyyah*) ordinance, whereby Allah decrees for something to be in a certain manner by His Own Providence; and the second type is known as a prescriptive (*tashrī'īyyah*) ordinance whereby Allah legislates others to act in accordance with His Will.

²³ This is discussed in great depth in *Al-Āmilī's* work, Pp. 65-69.

His existential ordinance) to remove all filth from you, O People of the Household, and to purify you with an utmost purification.”

This Divine ordinance that the *Ahl al-Bayt* should remain pure does not imply predestination or compulsion. It implies that Allah ﷻ has specifically provided the existential potentialities and the Divine Grace to the *Ahl al-Bayt* to willfully attain to the station of complete purity. Hence, He is separating the behaviour and conduct of the wives very decisively and making it clear that their actions are not to sully or contaminate the reputation of the Prophetic Household.

Your Houses vs. The House (*Buyūtikunna wa al-Bayt*)

There is another very important contextual indicator here that can be gleaned when looking at this verse in totality. One should note that the houses of the wives are specifically mentioned earlier in the verse with the word “*buyūtikunna*” (lit. “your houses” in the feminine plural); whereas in the Verse of *Taḥīr* we see that the word used is “*al-bayt*” (lit. “the house”) in the singular. This contradistinction should strike the reader as strange should the wives be included in the term *Ahl al-Bayt*; to the contrary, it serves as a deliberate indication that they are **not** included under the umbrella of this group. Rather, they have their own multiplicity of houses; and the People of that One House - a House which was already known to the listeners²⁴ - is different. Otherwise, one would very well have expected the verse to say “*ahl al-buyūt*” which means “people of the houses” instead of “*ahl al-bayt*.” The stark change from plural to singular is even further accentuated by the fact that in verse 34, the address to the wives’ homes again returns to “*buyūtikunna*” - “their houses” in the feminine plural

²⁴ Recall the discussion on *lām al-‘ahd* in our syntactical notes.

form. This is a clear contextual challenge for those who assert that the wives are the referents of this passage.

A Change in Pronouns (*Al-Ilṭifāt*)

Another very important contextual clue as alluded to by several commentators is that the pronoun changes within this verse from the feminine second-person plural pronoun كُنَّ - “*kunna*” (referring to ‘you’ in the sense of more than two females), to the masculine/general second-person plural pronoun كُمْ “*kum*” (which is used when addressing more than two men and/or a combination of more than two men and women). This serves an important purpose of including the menfolk (*idkhāl al-rijāl*) in the term “*Ahl al-Bayt*.”²⁵

Who are these menfolk which are included in this verse? Those who believe that the wives are being addressed in this verse have proposed many options, most saying that the verse has switched

²⁵ There are those who have argued that the only reason for the change in pronouns is because the word “*ahl*” is masculine, and therefore the pronoun change is simply *lafẓi* (only on a word level), having nothing to do with the meaning of including menfolk. However, this is only a descriptive explanation and does not explain why the verse changes the address to “*Ahl al-Bayt*.” Between the clear uses of the feminine pronouns, why is there a sudden masculine plural sandwiched between them if it truly has no function in the meaning?

Some have retorted that it is for the purpose of respect of the women (*al-ta’ẓīm*), however this is also a poor argument because this change happens clearly in the context of several feminine pronouns; so why is there suddenly added respect when the other pronouns are clearly feminine? This is not to mention the fact that some commentators such as al-Zamakhsharī have stated that *ahl* can be a masculine or a feminine word (see his *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* on Qurān, Sūrah al-Nisā’ (4), verse 75). Therefore, this explanation leaves much to be desired. We will treat this issue in more depth in our “Contentions” section.

pronouns to include the Prophet ﷺ, and some also add that it includes the fathers of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ.²⁶ This would supposedly be a simple solution to solve the problem of the change in pronouns. In other words, they are proposing that the verse means: "Allah only ordains these prohibitions and commandments on the wives so that the wives, the Prophet, and the fathers-in-law (of the Prophet) may all be purified."

However, on a more detailed analysis, it becomes clear that this is a very clunky and linguistically inelegant position; in addition to not being supported by the context, it suffers from several deficiencies from the standpoint of Qurānic eloquence. Let us suppose that we accept this theory for the sake of argument, the deficiencies are as follows:

1. The first problem has been pointed out by Sayyid 'Alī Qāḍī al-Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī where he states:

هل المراد من إذهاب الرجز عن «أهل البيت» هو دفع الرجز أو رفعه؟!
فإن كان الأول، فالزوجات خارجات عن حكم الآية؛ فإن أكثرهن - إن لم يكن
كلهن - كن في الرجز قبل الإسلام وإن كان الثاني، فلا محيص من القول بخروج
رسول الله ﷺ عن حكم الآية، فإنه لم يكن فيه الرجز أصلاً، لا قبل البعثة ولا
بعدها؛ باتفاق الأمة الإسلامية قاطبة
مع أن رسول الله ﷺ داخل في حكم الآية قطعاً بالاتفاق، فلا يمكن القول
بخروج رسول الله ﷺ عن حكمها فثبت الأول وانتفى الثاني، وخرجت الزوجات
عن حكم الآية قطعاً

Is the meaning of warding off filth (*idhhāb al-rijs*) from the *Ahl al-Bayt* here in the sense of repelling it from ever touching them (*al-daf'*), or alleviating it from them after they had already been sullied (*al-raf'*)? If one adopts the former meaning, then the wives are automatically excluded from this verse because most, if not all of them, were in a

²⁶ See Ibn 'Asākir's *Tahdhīb Tārīkh Madīnah Dimishq*, (An Abridged History of the City of Damascus), Pg. 209.

state of spiritual filth before Islām. If one should adopt the latter meaning, then one must remove the Prophet ﷺ from the import of this verse because all Muslims are unanimous that he was **never** sullied with any form of filth - either before or after his appointment to Prophethood (*al-bi'thah*). However, the Prophet ﷺ is included in the import of this verse by the agreement of all Muslims; therefore, it is not possible to exclude the Prophet. It thus becomes clear then that the meaning is 'the repelling of all filth (*al-daf'*),' and the wives therefore are definitively excluded from this verse.^{27 & 28}

2. The second problem has been pointed out by Sayyid al-ʿĀmilī in his book when defining the definition of purification. Is this essential purification (*al-taṭhīr al-jawharī*), or is it by accident (*al-taṭhīr al-ʿaraḍī*)? How are the menfolk (the Prophet ﷺ, and the fathers of his wives) being purified by the prescriptive ordinances that the wives of the Prophet are carrying out? The answer of course is that the purification of these menfolk is indirect by marital association (i.e., *ʿaraḍī*), while the wives are being purified directly by their obedience. Therefore, one is again utilizing a single shared word with multiple meanings (*isti'māl al-mushtarak fī akthar min ma'nā*), which is reprehensible in this case, given that a single pronoun is used for the *Ahl al-Bayt* and there is no contextual indicator (*qarīnah*) to specify a difference between its members.²⁹ In other words, one is saying that the purification

²⁷ *Ta'liqāt* of Sayyid 'Alī Qāḍī Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī on *Jawāmi' al-Jāmi'*, Pg. 372.

²⁸ This contention of Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī only applies if someone believes that the Prophet ﷺ was completely infallible, as do the Shī'ahs and many Sunnis. However, it would obviously be lost for those who believe that he was not. Nonetheless, the second argument still holds validity.

²⁹ A discussion on this principle in Foundations of Jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*) is beyond the scope of this article, but advanced readers may find a more detailed discussion on this topic at: tinyurl.com/4js8xkcp.

mentioned in these verses has two separate significations for two separate groups of individuals (i.e., the menfolk by association, and the womenfolk directly), although the verse indicates that the purification applies equally to the entire group of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Therefore, it becomes clear from the above that the change in pronoun presents a strong case for excluding the wives from the *Ahl al-Bayt*; otherwise, the meaning of the verse becomes nebulous, and the eloquence is negatively impacted. Instead, the meaning here is: "Allah only desires by commanding and prohibiting the wives of the Prophet to repel from you - O the Household of the Prophet - all filth and to purify you completely." This results in a clear and elegant understanding of the verse: Allāh ﷻ is placing the wives in a station of rebuke and admonishment to protect the reputation of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (i.e., the Five Personalities) from being sullied by marital association. In essence then, the meaning of this Verse of *Tathīr* becomes Allah's ﷻ absolving the *Ahl al-Bayt* of any defamation or blame - should the wives of the Prophet not observe the dictates of piety.

Argumentum A Fortiori (*Al-Awlawiyyah al-Qaṭ'iyyah*)

There is a specific rule in Foundations of Jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*) that should be used to understand this verse. It implies that when subjects of small significance are being addressed, then it automatically implies that subjects of greater significance are included as well. For example, when Allah ﷻ states in the Qurān: "Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it"³⁰ this automatically implies that anything greater or larger than an atom's weight will also be seen.

Allah's ﷻ address to the wives before switching to the *Ahl al-Bayt* is of this nature; an analogy may be prudent here. Suppose

³⁰ Qurān. Sūrah al-Zalzalah (99), verse 7.

you have a friend whom you respect, but he has a mischievous son who will sully the father's reputation by his devious actions. Therefore, you reprimand the child to behave properly to preserve the honour of his father. The child himself may not really be a cause of concern for you, but it is his association and relationship with the father that drives you to reprimand him. The Verse of *Tathir* is of similar significance here: It means that Allāh ﷻ is only rebuking and commanding the wives to behave well because otherwise their disobedience will reflect negatively on the *Ahl al-Bayt*. He is giving them double punishment for committing grave immorality, and double reward for obedience because their actions will have a bearing on the Prophetic Household. The *Ahl al-Bayt* are the ones whom Allāh ﷻ is concerned about, and He does not want them to be touched by even the smallest iota of filth from those marginally associated with them. Therefore, Allāh ﷻ goes so far as to prescribe duties and responsibilities to others (i.e., the wives) in order to preserve the integrity of the Prophetic Household.

In turn, it follows that since Allāh ﷻ wants to protect the *Ahl al-Bayt* from even such a secondary and accidental attribution of filth, they must be purified in the primary and essential significance within themselves already, based on this very principle.

Our scholars have expounded on this idea in their writings, which we translate below:

1. Al-Shahid al-'Allāmah al-Tustarī رحمه الله writes:

لا يبعد أن يكون اختلاف أسلوب آية التطهير لما قبلها على طريق الالتفات من الأزواج إلى النبي وأهل بيته ﷺ على معنى أن تأديب الأزواج وترغيبهن إلى الصلاح والسداد من توابع إذهاب الرجس والدنس عن أهل البيت ﷺ فحاصل نظم الآية على هذا أن الله تعالى رغب أزواج النبي ﷺ إلى العفة والصلاح بأنه إنما أراد في الأزل أن يجعلكم معصومين يا أهل البيت واللائق أن يكون المنسوب إلى المعصوم عفيفا صالحا كما قال ﴿الطيبات للطيبين﴾

It is not far-fetched that the digression in the form of address from the wives to the *Ahl al-Bayt* in the Verse of *Taḥhīr* is for this purpose: Reprimanding the wives and encouraging them towards piety is a concomitant of warding off filth and uncleanness from the *Ahl al-Bayt* ﷺ. Therefore, the import of this verse becomes that Allah is encouraging the wives of the Messenger ﷺ to be chaste and righteous because He has preordained that the *Ahl al-Bayt* are infallible; therefore, it behooves one who is tied to an infallible to be chaste and righteous - as (the Qurān) states [in Sūrah al-Nūr (24), verse 26] that: "The pure men are for the pure women."³¹

2. In the same vein, 'Allamāh Muḥaffar states the following:

وإنما جعل سبحانه هذه الآية في أثناء ذكر الأزواج وخطابهن للتنبية على أنه سبحانه أمرهن ونهاهن وأدبهن إكراما لأهل البيت وتنزيها لهم عن أن تتألم بسببهن وصمة، وصونا لهم عن أن يلحقهم من أجلهن عيب، ورفعاً لهم عن أن يتصل بهم أهل المعاصي، ولذا استهل سبحانه الآيات بقوله: ﴿يَا نِسَاءَ النَّبِيِّ لَسْتُنَّ كَأَحَدٍ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ﴾ ضرورة أن هذا التمييز إنما هو للاتصال بالنبي وآله، لا لذواتهن فهن في محل، وأهل البيت في محل آخر، فليست الآية الكريمة إلا كقول القائل: يا زوجة فلان لست كأزواج سائر الناس فتعففي، وتستري، وأطيعي الله تعالى، إنما زوجك من بيت أطهار يريد الله حفظهم من الأدناس وصونهم عن النقائص

Allah, the Almighty has only placed this verse amidst mentioning and addressing the wives to allude that He commanded, prohibited, and disciplined them out of respect for the *Ahl al-Bayt*, to ward off any aspersion of being sullied by their misdeeds, to protect them from being associated with their deficiencies, and to elevate them above the station of those who may disobey Allah. It is as such that Allah addresses them as: 'O wives of the Prophet, you are not like

³¹ *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-Muhriqah*, Pg. 147.

other women,' because their association with the Prophet and his family made them distinct - not because of their own merit, but because of the *Ahl al-Bayt*'s merit. The verse's import does not exceed what one may say: 'O wife of so-and-so: you are not like the wives of other men so be chaste, be modest, and obey Allah - for you are the wife of a man from a purified Household, which Allah has ordained for purity from all deficiencies and repugnance.'³²

B. In the Specific Passage

The Volition (*al-Irādah*) of the Wives

Another very important point that can be gleaned from reading the entire passage in context is that the existential ordinance (*al-irādah al-takwīniyyah*) mentioned for the *Ahl al-Bayt* is that they be completely removed from all filth and be absolutely purified. In contrast, Allah ﷻ did not have such a Will for the wives as is made clear in the very first verse of the passage, known as *Āyah al-Takhyīr*, where He says:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِّأَزْوَاجِكَ إِن كُنْتُمْ تُرِيدْنَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا فَتَعَالَيْنَ أُمَتِّعْكُنَّ وَأُسَرِّحْكُنَّ سَرَاحًا جَمِيلًا وَإِن كُنْتُمْ تُرِيدْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ
وَالْآخِرَةَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ أَعَدَّ لِلْمُحْسِنَاتِ مِنكُنَّ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا﴾

O Prophet! Tell your wives: 'If you desire (*turidna*) this world and its glitter, then come I shall provide for you and then release you (from matrimony) graciously. But if you desire (*turidna*) Allah, and His Messenger, and the Hereafter, then Allah has prepared for those among you (*minkunna*)

³² *Iḥqāq al-Ḥaqq*, Vol. 2, Pg. 570.

who are virtuous a great reward. (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), verses 28-29)

Notice that the wives are not mentioned in these verses in a way that indicates a special Divine ordinance that establishes their righteousness. Rather, they are being told by Allah ﷻ that it is completely up to them and their desires if they want to be affiliated with the Prophet ﷺ or not. As for those of them who choose the path of Allah ﷻ, they will be rewarded for their good deeds. Nonetheless, notice that the verse uses the partitive preposition - *minkunna* - مِنْكُنَّ, implying that there are only **some** among the wives of the Prophet ﷺ who will deserve a great reward due to their virtuosity. This is an implicit acknowledgement that there will be some wives of the Prophet ﷺ who will **not** receive the Divine reward due to their lack of virtuosity, which would again exclude them from the elevated purified rank of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

The Harmony of the Context (*Al-Siyāq al-Munsajim*)

When one reads the verses in context starting from verse 28, it becomes clear that the original address in these verses is Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, and that he is being commanded to tell his wives all the subsequent ordinances. In fact, this whole chapter is built on this theme, starting from the very first verse which is addressed directly to the Prophet ﷺ:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ أَتَىٰ اللَّهُ وَلَا تُطِيعُ الْكَافِرِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا
حَكِيمًا﴾

O Prophet! Remain conscious of Allah and defer not to the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites: for Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Wise. (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), verse 1)

Therefore, although verses 29-34 appear to directly be addressing the wives they are in fact a continuation of the address to Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ in verse 28 with the implied command "Say" (*Qul*).

In essence, Allah ﷻ is telling the Prophet ﷺ to tell his wives the following commands:

1. To choose between Allah ﷻ and the glitter of this world.
2. That they are not like other women.
3. Not to be flirtatious in their speech.
4. To speak with civility.
5. To stay in their houses.
6. Not to be ostentatious like the ostentatiousness of the people during the Era of Ignorance.
7. To establish prayers and pay alms.
8. To obey Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ.

Thereafter, Allah ﷻ turns his address back to the Household of Prophethood and addresses them saying: "Allah is only prescribing these commands on the wives in order to ward off filth from you - O *Ahl al-Bayt* - and utterly purify you." Then Allah ﷻ turns back to the wives of the Prophet ﷺ in verse 34 to again remind them about the stature of the Five Personalities, calling them to bear in mind that they have Divine Revelation and Prophetic Wisdom being expounded in their midst. This makes it clear that the whole passage is dedicated to absolving the *Ahl al-Bayt*, at whose head lies Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, from any of the possible misdeeds that may issue from his wives.

Are the Wives Being Praised in this Passage?

لَا يَأْتِي نِسَاءَ النَّبِيِّ مَن يَأْتِي مِنْكُنَّ بِفَاحِشَةٍ مُّبَيَّنَةٍ يُضَاعَفُ لَهَا الْعَذَابُ
ضِعْفَيْنِ ۚ وَكَانَ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرًا ۚ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ مِثْلَ ذَلِكَ ۙ يَفْعَلْهُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ
وَتَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا نُؤْتِيهَا أَجْرَهَا مَرَّتَيْنِ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لَهَا رِزْقًا كَرِيمًا يَا نِسَاءَ النَّبِيِّ
لَسْتُنَّ كَأَحَدٍ مِّنَ النِّسَاءِ ۚ إِنِ اتَّقَيْتُنَّ فَلَا تَحْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ ۚ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي
قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلًا مَّعْرُوفًا ۚ وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ

الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى ۚ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا وَادْكُرْنَ مَا يُتْلَىٰ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ لَطِيفًا خَبِيرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

O wives of the Prophet! Whosoever of you commits manifest abomination, the punishment for her will be doubled, and that is easy for Allah. And whosoever of you is submissive to Allah and His Messenger and does right, We shall give her reward twice over; and We have prepared for her a rich provision. O wives of the Prophet! You are not like other women: if you keep your duty (to Allah), then do not be soft in (your) speech, such that he in whose heart is a disease aspire (to you), but (rather) utter customary speech. And abide quietly in your homes, and do not flaunt your charms as they used to flaunt them in the Days of Ignorance; and be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed to Allah and His Messenger: **for Allah only ordains (these commands to the wives) in order to remove from you all that is repugnant, O *Ahl al-Bayt* (People of the House), and to purify you to (utmost) purity.** And remember all that is recited in your homes of Allah's messages and [His] Wisdom: for Allah is Unfathomable [in His Wisdom], All-Aware. (Surah Aḥzāb (33), verses 30-34)

Another very important contextual clue is that the wives are not being praised in the entirety of this passage. As we mentioned before, the syntax of the Verse of *Taṭhīr* (which is bolded above) makes it clear that all filth is being repudiated from the *Ahl al-Bayt* and they are identified as being completely purified. Meanwhile, Allah ﷻ is acknowledging the possibility that the wives could commit abominable sins (*fāḥishah mubayyinah*); they are being told not to be ostentatious like during the times of the Era of Ignorance; they are being commanded not to speak in a flirtatious

manner; and they are being promised double punishment or double reward depending on their actions. When the likelihood of the wives falling into such sins is being acknowledged, would any intelligent reader really believe that it fits the context for Allah ﷻ to then ordain repelling all uncleanness from them? Rather, it is clear from the passage itself that they are being **warned** to behave properly so that they do not cast any aspersions on the reputation of the Household.

Another delicate point is that the word *al-rijs* as we alluded to earlier also subsumes the meaning of Divine Punishment, which is completely being negated from the *Ahl al-Bayt* in this passage. In contrast, the wives are being threatened with “double punishment” if they commit a sin (*fāḥishah*). This indicates even further that they cannot be the addressees of the purification that Allah ﷻ is referring to in this Verse of *Taṭhīr*.

Other Verses of the Qurān that are Relevant

A. “That is purer for their hearts and your hearts.”

﴿وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ وَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُؤْذُوا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَنْ تُنكِحُوا أَرْوَاحَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَبَدًا إِنَّ ذَلِكُمْ كَانَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمًا﴾

...And when you (O believers) ask them (the wives) regarding something you need, then ask them from behind a veil. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. Moreover, it is not for you to give offence to Allah's Apostle - just as it is not for you to ever marry his widows after he passes away: that verily, would be an enormity in the sight of Allah. (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), verse 53)

This verse is clear in showing that the purification of the wives is not one of “complete and superlative purification” as alluded to in

the Verse of *Taḥhīr*, rather it is only a matter of relative purity (*aṭhariyyah*), and not absolute purity (*taḥhīr muṭlaq*). Thus, Allah ﷻ places the matter of the wives' purification on the same pedestal as the purification of the believers in this verse, lending support to the fact that there is nothing exclusive about the purification of the wives. There is furthermore an indication here that talking to the wives of the Prophet ﷺ freely without a veil can affect the purity of their hearts - and this does not match the spirit of an existential Divine decree of purification. One may retort that the whole affair of placing a veil indicates a special sanctimony for the wives of the Prophet ﷺ but reading the verse in context again reveals that the focus of this ordinance is to protect the Prophet's ﷺ reputation and integrity, and not for the wives in themselves. Considering these factors, when this verse 53 is closely analyzed and compared to the Verse of *Taḥhīr*, a clear difference becomes apparent in the way that the wives' purification is being discussed, and the way the *Ahl al-Bayt*'s purification had been presented.³³

B. "If he (the Prophet) should divorce you all, perhaps Allah will replace him with better wives."

﴿عَسَىٰ رَبُّهُ إِنْ طَلَّقَكُنَّ أَنْ يُبَدِّلَهُ أَزْوَاجًا خَيْرًا مِنْكُنَّ مُسْلِمَاتٍ
مُؤْمِنَاتٍ قَنَاطَاتٍ نَّبِيَّاتٍ عَابِدَاتٍ سَابِحَاتٍ نَّيَّباتٍ وَأَبْكَارًا﴾

Perhaps his Lord, if he (the Prophet) divorces you (wives), will give him in your place wives better than you - submissive (to Allah), believing, devoutly obedient, repentant, worshipping, inclined to fasting - both (from the) widows and virgins. (Sūrah al-Taḥrīm (66), verse 5)

This verse alludes to the fact that there were women who were better than the wives of the Prophet ﷺ and precludes their inclusion in the verse of *taḥhīr*, since the latter verse indicates a

³³ Al-ʿĀmilī, *Ahl al-Bayt fī Āyah al-Taḥhīr*, Pg. 273.

superlative and exclusive merit of being completely cleansed of all filth (i.e. absolute purification). Given that the wives of the Prophet ﷺ (namely 'Ā'ishah and Hafṣah) are being reprimanded in the above verse, there is a powerful indication here that they are not the intended group for the Divine Purification alluded to in the Verse of *Taṭhīr*. Rather, this verse completely negates the notion of Allah ﷻ ordaining superlative purification of the wives from its very core. This verse indicates that the purity of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ is just like any other Muslim, and that there were other women who far exceeded their virtues. However, as previously stated they were held to a higher standard only as far as the fact that they were the wives of the most purified man to walk on this Earth, and in-laws of his immaculate Household.

C. "You may defer whichever of them you wish and receive any of them you wish."

﴿تُرْجَىٰ مَنْ نَّشَاءُ مِنْهُمْ وَتُوْوَىٰ إِلَيْكَ مَنْ نَّشَاءُ وَمَنْ ابْتَغَيْتَ مِنْهُمْ غَزَلْتَ
فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكَ﴾

You (O Muḥammad) may defer whichever of them (your wives) you wish and receive any of them you wish; and you may call back any of those whom you had (temporarily) set aside: there will be no blame on you (on this account). (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), verse 51)

This verse demonstrates that the Prophet ﷺ had complete jurisdiction to separate himself from his wives; and their being part of the Prophet's ﷺ life was also completely up to his own discretion. This is in stark contrast to the *Ahl al-Bayt* mentioned in the Verse of *Taṭhīr*, who are part and parcel of the Prophet's ﷺ Household and are not separated from him no matter what. This will become clearer in the next discussion when we look at the opinion of Zayd ibn Arqam, who points out this exact fact to

disqualify the wives of the Prophet ﷺ from being included in the term *Ahl al-Bayt*.

What do the *Aḥadīth* and History Specifically Tell Us?

We previously discussed how the language and the contextual clues in this Verse of *Taṭhīr* support the exclusion of the wives and make it clear that the *Ahl al-Bayt* are a very exceptional group who have been exclusively selected by Allah ﷻ for the highest laudation. We will now discuss the traditionist (*naqlī*) sources, and what they specifically reveal to us about who the addressee are in the Verse of *Taṭhīr*. This is by far the strongest piece of evidence in supporting the exclusion of the wives. Of course, Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is the most knowledgeable about the Qurān, and his words supersedes everything else when it comes to interpreting who the *Ahl al-Bayt* are.

The Narration of the Cloak (*Ḥadīth al-Kisā'*)

The famous Narration of the Cloak has been narrated in both Sunnī and Shī'ah sources and is generally accepted as very reliable (*mutawātir*)³⁴ by all. It is reported in a copious number of sources, and we have selected just one version of the story here as follows:

عن عمر بن أبي سلمة ربيب النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال لما نزلت هذه الآية على النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ﴿إِنَّمَا يَرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ

³⁴ *Mutawātir* is perhaps best translated as “hyper-corroborated” in English, and is a term used to describe ‘a narration that is abundantly narrated and attested to in the ḥadīth corpus.’ The implication is that it is virtually impossible for the narrators to have conspired in its fabrication. There are two types of hyper-corroborated narrations: those which attain this status at the textual level (*al-lafzī*), and those which attain it only at the level of implication (*al-ma'nawī*). A detailed exposition of *mutawātir* is beyond the scope of this humble piece.

أهل البيت ويظهركم تطهيرا³⁵ في بيت أم سلمة فدعا فاطمة و حسنا و حسينا
فجللهم بكساء و علي خلف ظهره فجللهم بكساء ثم قال اللهم هؤلاء أهل
بيتي فأذهب عنهم الرجس وطهرهم تطهيرا قالت أم سلمة وأنا معهم يا نبي
الله؟ قال أنت على مكانك وأنت على خير




On the authority of 'Umar ibn Abi Salamah, the foster-son of the Prophet ﷺ who said: "When the verse: 'Allah only intends but to keep (all) impurity away from you, O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and to purify you absolutely' was revealed upon the Messenger ﷺ in the house of Umm Salamah, he called Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn, and spread a cloak over them, while 'Alī was behind him. Then, he covered them all with a cloak. Then he said: 'O Allah! These are my *Ahl al-Bayt*. Keep impurity away from them and purify them absolutely.' Umm Salamah then said: 'Am I with them, O Prophet of Allah?' He replied: 'You remain in your place, and you are upon goodness.'³⁵








This *ḥadīth* has so many chains that it is generally accepted as a reliable and well-established narration (*mutawātir ḥadīth*) among all Muslims. In this regard to this, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī states in his commentary of the Qurān about this verse:

وهي روايات جمة تزيد على سبعين حديثا يربو ما ورد منها من طرق أهل
السنة على ما ورد منها من طرق الشيعة فقد روتها أهل السنة بطرق كثيرة
عن أم سلمة وعائشة وأبي سعيد الخدري وسعد ووائلة بن الأسقع وأبي الحمراء
وابن عباس وثوبان مولى النبي وعبد الله بن جعفر وعلي والحسن بن علي
في قريب من أربعين طريقا.

وروتها الشيعة عن علي والسجاد والباقر والصادق والرضا عليهم السلام وأم سلمة
وأبي ذر وأبي ليلى وأبي الأسود الدؤلي وعمرو بن ميمون الأودي وسعد بن أبي
وقاص في بضع وثلاثين طريقا.


³⁵ *Al-Jāmi' al-Shāḥiḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, Vol. 5, Pg. 351.

These are many narrations, exceeding seventy in number, narrated more by the chains of Ahl al-Sunnah than those of the Shi'ah. The Ahl al-Sunnah have narrated it from numerous chains on the authority of Umm Salamah, 'Ā'ishah, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, Sa'd (ibn Abī Waqqāṣ), Wāthilah ibn Asqa', Abū al-Ḥamrā', Ibn 'Abbās, Thawbān (the servant of the Prophet), 'Abdullāh ibn Ja'far, Imām 'Alī , and Imām Ḥasan ibn 'Alī  in over forty chains. The Shi'ah have narrated it from Imāms 'Alī, al-Sajjād, al-Bāqir, al-Ṣādiq, al-Riḍā , Umm Salamah, Abū Dharr, Abū Laylā, Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī, 'Amr ibn Maymūn al-Awdī, and Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ in around thirty chains.³⁶

As is clear from the *aḥādīth*, the Prophet  restricted the meaning of *Ahl al-Bayt* to the Five Personalities and did not allow Umm Salamah to join them underneath the cloak. There are other versions of this narration, including those which indicate that this occurred in the house of 'Ā'ishah or Zaynab who requested to join those Five under the cloak, but they were also turned away. As Sayyid al-Āmilī notes, the variance in the narrations likely indicates that this event happened several times in the homes of different wives to emphasize the status of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and affirms that the wives were excluded.³⁷ This *ḥadīth* is the strongest piece of evidence of the Prophet  specifically clarifying the meaning of the term *Ahl al-Bayt* as a specific group limited to the Five Personalities [Prophet Muḥammad , Imām 'Alī , Imām Ḥasan , Imām Ḥusayn , and Lady Fāṭima , and excluded his wives.³⁸

³⁶ *Tafsīr al-Mizān*, Vol. 12, Pg. 311.

³⁷ Refer to his book *Ahl al-Bayt fī Āyah al-Taḥīr*, Pp. 50-51.

³⁸ There are two outliers of *Ḥadīth al-Kisā'* (*shādhah* narrations) that differ slightly in reference to the response that the Prophet  gave to Umm Salamah when she tried to enter under the cloak. In one version, in response to her question about whether she was from the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the

Zayd ibn Arqam's View of the *Ahl al-Bayt*

The view of Zayd ibn Arqam, one of the senior companions of the Prophet ﷺ, is specifically relevant because it substantiates the view of a companion of the Prophet ﷺ that the wives are not included in the term *Ahl al-Bayt*. Moreover, Zayd's view is in concordance with the Qurān, which clearly states that the wives are not tied to the Prophet ﷺ essentially and are only accidental - meaning that they may leave the Prophet ﷺ or be divorced at any time. The *ḥadīth* from Zayd ibn Arqam narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* is as follows:

بإسناده عن يزيد بن حيان عن زيد بن أرقم قال: قال رسول الله: ألا إني تارك فيكم ثقلين: أحدهما كتاب الله ﷻ هو جبل الله من اتبعه كان على الهدى، ومن تركه كان على ضلالة، وفيه فقلنا: من أهل بيته نساؤه؟ قال: لا وأيم الله

Prophet ﷺ told her: "Yes, if Allāh wills." Another version notes that the Prophet ﷺ allowed her to enter under the cloak after his supplication for the Five Personalities. These two versions contradict most narrations which mention that Umm Salamah was barred entry. However, even these versions also support the exclusivity of the *Ahl al-Bayt* when one reflects upon them.

In the former narration, the Prophet ﷺ attaches Umm Salamah's association with the *Ahl al-Bayt* based on Allāh's Will, but does not affirm it categorically. In the latter narration, Umm Salamah is only allowed under the cloak after the Prophet ﷺ had already finished his supplication for the specific Five Personalities. This indicates that Umm Salamah's being included under the cloak was only out of the Prophet's ﷺ sympathy and owing to her obedience, although her being permitted inside of the cloak was only secondary and by association. This is in line with narrations that affirm Salmān al-Muḥammadi's being part of the *Ahl al-Bayt*; it is obviously not meant in the primary signification of the specific Five Personalities, but rather in a secondary sense due to his piety and being loyal to the Prophetic Household.

إن المرأة تكون مع الرجل العصر من الدهر ثم يطلقها فترجع إلى أبيها وقومها، أهل بيته أصله وعصبته الذين حرّموا الصدقة بعده

Based on a chain from Yazīd ibn Ḥayyān on the authority of Zayd ibn Arqam who said: "The Prophet said I am leaving to you two weighty things: the Book of Allah, the Almighty, which is the Rope of Allah - whosoever follows it is on guidance and whosoever abandons it is on deviation." Then we said: "Who are the *Ahl al-Bayt* - his womenfolk?" He answered: "No way, by Allah! A woman can be with a man for a period of time then he divorces her, and she returns to her father and people. The *Ahl al-Bayt* are his kith and kin for whom charity is prohibited after his passing."^{39,40}

Of course, Zayd adopts a very inclusive meaning of the *Ahl al-Bayt* to include all of those from the Banū Hāshim for whom charity is prohibited. We will examine this view in the rebuttal of contentions later, however the point in this section is to

³⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Vol. 2, Pg. 459.

⁴⁰ There is another version narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* as well, the relevant section of which is as follows. It should be known that in our translation we have rendered the response of Zayd as an interrogative, because the use of "rather" afterwards indicates it was rhetorical question:

فَقَالَ لَهُ حُصَيْنٌ وَمَنْ أَهْلُ بَيْتِهِ يَا زَيْدُ أَلَيْسَ نِسَاؤُهُ مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ قَالَ نِسَاؤُهُ مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ وَلَكِنْ أَهْلُ بَيْتِهِ مَنْ حُرِّمَ الصَّدَقَةُ بَعْدَهُ. قَالَ وَمَنْ هُمْ قَالَ هُمْ آلُ عَلِيٍّ وَآلُ عَقِيلٍ وَآلُ جَعْفَرٍ وَآلُ عَبَّاسٍ. قَالَ كُلُّ هَؤُلَاءِ حُرِّمَ الصَّدَقَةُ قَالَ نَعَمْ

Ḥuṣayn said to him (Zayd): "Who are his *Ahl al-Bayt*, O Zayd? Are his wives not from his *Ahl al-Bayt*?" Thereupon he (Zayd) replied: "His wives are his *Ahl al-Bayt*? Rather, the members of his family are those for whom the acceptance of charity is forbidden." Ḥuṣayn then asked: "Who are they?" Thereupon Zayd answered: "They are the offspring of 'Alī, the offspring of 'Aqīl, the offspring of Ja'far, and the offspring of 'Abbas." Ḥuṣayn further questioned: "These are all those for whom the acceptance of charity is forbidden?" Zayd replied: "Yes."

substantiate that the view of Zayd is also quite clear that the wives of the Prophet ﷺ are not subsumed in the term *Ahl al-Bayt*.

The Prophet Commands the *Ahl al-Bayt* towards *Ṣalāt*

Another highly reliable *ḥadīth* is one which narrates that when verse 132 of Sūrah Ṭāhā was revealed commanding the Prophet ﷺ to enjoin his family towards *ṣalāt*,⁴¹ the Prophet ﷺ would go daily to the house of Imām ‘Alī (عليه السلام) and Lady Fāṭima (عليها السلام) at dawn and recite the Verse of *Taḥīr* to them from outside. This served as an indication that they were the exclusive referents of this verse:

عن أنس بن مالك، أن رسول الله ﷺ كان يمر بباب فاطمة رضي الله عنها ستة أشهر إذا خرج لصلاة الفجر، يقول: الصلاة يا أهل البيت (إمّا يريد الله ليذهب عنكم الرجس أهل البيت ويطهركم تطهيرا)

On the authority of Anas bin Mālik who said that the Prophet ﷺ used to go to the door of Fāṭima for six months whenever he went for the dawn prayers, and he would say: “(Heed) the prayer, O *Ahl al-Bayt*! Indeed Allah only desires to remove all filth from you, O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and purify you a complete purification.”⁴²

This *ḥadīth* has been narrated by over 300 companions with just some variation in regard to how long the Prophet ﷺ persisted in this action - some narrations say forty days, while others say that he continued to do this until the end of his life. As al-‘Āmilī notes, this variation can be accounted for by the fact that various

⁴¹ This is verse 132 of Sūrah Ṭāhā where Allāh ﷻ says: “And command your family to prayer and be persistent in it. We do not ask you for sustenance, rather We provide sustenance to you. And the (best) outcome is for (those who are) righteous (have *taqwā*).”

⁴² *Al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, Vol. 4, Pg. 145.

companions tracked the Prophet ﷺ doing this for different lengths of time, however the fact that he continued to do so until the end of his life is quite likely. Again, this demonstrates how keen the Prophet ﷺ was to repeatedly demonstrate to the people who the *Ahl al-Bayt* were by addressing them as such daily.⁴³

The Event (*Hadīth*) of *Mubāhalah*

The well-known event wherein the Christians of Najrān belied the Prophet's ﷺ message and were challenged to a mutual imprecation (*mubāhalah*) is also highly instructive. In this narration, we also find the usage of the term "*Ahl al-Bayt*" for the immaculate Five Personalities exclusively. The event is expounded in a long *ḥadīth* narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, wherein Mu'āwiyah asked Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ why he refrains from insulting Imām 'Alī (عليه السلام). We have extracted just the relevant part of the long narration here:

عن عامر بن سعد بن أبي وقاص عن أبيه قال: أمر معاوية بن أبي سفيان سعدا فقال ما منعك أن تسب أبا تراب؟ فقال أما ما ذكرت ثلاثا قالهن له رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فلن أسبه لئن تكون لي واحدة منهن أحب إلي من حمر النعم... ولما نزلت هذه الآية ﴿فقل تعالوا ندع أبناءنا وأبناءكم﴾ دعا رسول الله عليا وفاطمة وحسنا وحسينا فقال اللهم هؤلاء أهل بيتي

'Āmir ibn Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ narrates from his father who said: "Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān commanded Sa'd (to insult Imām 'Alī), and then asked him: 'What is it that prevents you from insulting Abū Turāb?' (So) he (Sa'd) responded: 'As for what you have queried (it is because of) three things that the Prophet ﷺ said about him that I will never insult him - and I swear that if I had just one of these (merits) it would be more beloved to me than red camels. When this verse [“Then say: Come let us bring our sons and (you bring)

⁴³ Refer to his book, *Ahl al-Bayt fī Āyah al-Taḥrīr*, Pp. 39-43.

your sons...^{44]} was revealed, the Apostle of Allah called ‘Alī, Faṭīma, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn, and then said: ‘O my Lord, these are my *Ahl al-Bayt*.’”⁴⁵

The Narration (*Ḥadīth*) of *Thaqalayn*

Among one of the most highly attested narrations par excellence between Shī‘ahs and Sunnis is the Narration of the Two Weighty Things (*Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn*), which is as follows:

عَنْ زَيْدِ بْنِ أَرْقَمَ، عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «إِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ مَا إِن تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِ لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدِي أَحَدُهُمَا أَعْظَمُ مِنَ الْآخَرِ: كِتَابُ اللَّهِ حَبْلٌ مَمْدُودٌ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ. وَعِزَّتِي أَهْلُ بَيْتِي، وَلَنْ يَتَفَرَّقَا حَتَّى يَرِدَا عَلَيَّ الْخَوْضَ فَاَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ تَخْلُقُونِي فِيهِمَا

Zayd ibn Arqam narrates on the authority of the Prophet of Allah ﷺ that he said: “I am leaving for you that which if you hold onto them, you shall never deviate after me, and one (of them) is greater than the other: The Book of Allah - which is an extended rope between the Heavens and the Earth; and my progeny, my *Ahl al-Bayt*. They shall never separate until they return to me at the Pond (of *Kawthar*). Therefore, carefully consider how you treat them both after me.”⁴⁶

This *ḥadīth* is accepted by all beyond dispute, and the specific wording of the Prophet ﷺ where he states that he is leaving behind the *Ahl al-Bayt* is an important piece of evidence which again affirms what we have mentioned about these great Five Personalities. As he states, his *Ahl al-Bayt* will never separate from the Qurān until they reach him in the Hereafter at the Pond of *Kawthar*. This is another strong endorsement of their infallibility,

⁴⁴ Quran, Sūrah Āle ‘Imrān (3), verse 61.

⁴⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Vol. 4, Ḥadīth 1871.

⁴⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*, Vol. 2, Pg. 308.

while also excluding the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, some of whom at least on a collective level did indeed go against the Qurānic commandments. When ‘Ā’ishah, one of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, fought against Imām ‘Alī (عليه السلام), she went against the clear commandment of the Qurān that she should remain in her home; in fact, this very Verse of *Taḥhīr* was used against ‘Ā’ishah by Umm Salamah to prove that she was in the wrong.⁴⁷

The Wives Never Used this Verse to Prove their Superiority

A subtle point attributed to the great Shī‘ah historian and scholar, ‘Allāmah al-Aminī, is that the wives never used the Verse of *Taḥhīr* to affirm their merit, even though some of them (i.e., ‘Ā’ishah) were in dire need to provide an air of legitimacy for their rebellion against Imām ‘Alī (عليه السلام). Nonetheless, there is no historical report that substantiates them ever having utilized this verse to prove their own virtue, even though as we previously elucidated, this verse is clear in its high laudation. This is another powerful clue derived from historical context; as a famous rule used in *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* states: لو كان بيان - if it exists, then it would have been elucidated.⁴⁸

In fact, ‘Ā’ishah herself acknowledges that the Verse of *Taḥhīr* was specifically revealed for the Five Personalities when she was confronted about her revolt against Imām ‘Alī (عليه السلام), as narrated by al-Bayhaqī:

⁴⁷ The debate between ‘Ā’ishah and Umm Salamah is well-documented in the books of the Ahl al-Sunnah. Before ‘Ā’ishah waged the War of Jamal, Umm Salamah gave her advice with reference to this verse 33 of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb which urges the wives of the Prophet ﷺ to stay in their homes, and not be ostentatious like during the Times of Ignorance.

⁴⁸ See al-‘Āmili’s book *Ahl al-Bayt fī Āyah al-Taḥhīr*, Pg. 119.

سئلت عائشة رضي الله عنها عن أمير المؤمنين علي بن أبي طالب، رضي الله عنه، فقالت: وما عسيت أن أقول فيه وهو أحب الناس إلى رسول الله، صلى الله عليه وسلم؟ لقد رأيت رسول الله، صلى الله عليه وسلم، قد جمع شملته على علي وفاطمة والحسن والحسين وقال: هؤلاء أهل بيتي اللهم أذهب عنهم الرجس وطهرهم تطهيراً. قيل لها: فكيف سرت إليه؟ قالت: أنا نادمة! وكان ذلك قدراً مقدوراً

‘Ā’ishah was asked about the Commander of the Faithful (Amir al-Mu’minin) ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib رضي الله عنه, and she said: “What could I say about him while he is the most beloved person to the Messenger of Allah? I saw the Messenger of Allah gather his cloak around ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn, and then he said: ‘These are my *Ahl al-Bayt* - O Allah ward off all filth from them and purify them to the utmost.” It was said to her: “Then why did you revolt against him?” She answered: “I am regretful about it, but it was a preordained affair.”⁴⁹

If the wives of the Prophet ﷺ were included in this verse, then it would have been completely possible for ‘Ā’ishah to retort to the questioner that she is also part of this group that Allah has purified, but she did not say anything about it. Thus, it was very clear to her that she was **not** part of the *Ahl al-Bayt* described in this verse!

Furthermore, there is another clear testament within the *ḥadīth* corpus from another wife of the Prophet ﷺ, Umm Salamah, in reference to this verse where she is even clearer in that the referents of this verse did **not** include her:

عن عمرة الهمدانية: أنها دخلت على أم سلمة زوج النبي ﷺ قالت: يا أمّة ألا تخبريني عن هذا الرجل الذي قتل بين أظهرنا فمحب و مبغض قالت لها أم سلمة: أتجيبنه قالت: لا أحبّه ولا أبغضه تريد علي بن أبي طالب فقالت لها أم سلمة: أنزل الله تعالى ﴿إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَ

⁴⁹ *Al-Maḥāsin wa al-Masāwī*, Vol. 1, Pg. 137.

يُطَهِّرْكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا ۖ وَ مَا فِي الْبَيْتِ إِلَّا جَبْرِئِيلُ وَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَ عَلِيٌّ وَ فَاطِمَةُ وَ
 الْحَسَنُ وَ الْحُسَيْنُ وَ أَنَا، فَقُلْتُ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَنَا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْبَيْتِ فَقَالَ: رَسُولُ
 اللَّهِ: أَنْتِ مِنْ صَالِحِ نِسَائِي فَلَوْ كَانَ قَالَ: نَعَمْ كَانَ أَحَبَّ إِلَيَّ - مِمَّا تَطْلَعُ عَلَيْهِ
 الشَّمْسُ وَ تَغْرُبُ

It has been narrated by 'Amrah al-Hamdāniyyah that she entered upon Umm Salamah, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ, and said: "O my mother, will you not inform me about that man who was killed amongst us while being both loved and hated?" (By this she meant 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib). Umm Salamah asked her: "Do you love him?" She answered: "I do not love him, nor do I hate him." Then Umm Salamah told her: "Allah revealed the verse: 'Allah only desires thereby to purge all filth from you, O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and to completely purify you,' while there was none in the house except Jibrā'il, the Apostle of Allah, 'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and I. Then I asked: 'O Apostle of Allah, am I from the *Ahl al-Bayt*?' He replied: 'You are among my righteous wives.'" [Then Umm Salamah continued]: "If only he had said yes, it would have been dearer to me than everything upon which the sun rises and sets."⁵⁰

The Imāms of *Ahl al-Bayt* used this Verse to explain their Merit

In contradistinction to the wives, there are abundant texts within the *ḥadīth* corpus which substantiate that the *Ahl al-Bayt* utilized this verse to substantiate their merit, and indicate to others that they were specifically graced with Allah's immaculate purification.⁵¹ The evidences (*shawāhid*) for this are beyond the

⁵⁰ *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl li Qawā'id al-Tafḍīl*, Vol. 2, Pg. 132.

⁵¹ We are utilizing *aḥādīth* in this section without regard to whether they are from Shi'ah or Sunnī sources, and without detailed scrutiny about

scope of this writing, and entire books have been written on this issue. Therefore, we will suffice to present just single narrations from the other members of the *Ahl al-Kisā'*, some selected *aḥādīth* from the latter Imāms, and the words of Zaynab and Zayd ibn 'Alī عليه السلام. More details can be found in Sayyid al-Abṭahī's excellent book which we referenced earlier. Among these pieces of evidence are the following:

1. Imām 'Alī عليه السلام utilized this Verse of *Taṭhīr* when he disputed with the companions about him being more worthy to be the successor (*khalīfah*) of the Prophet ﷺ after his death:

وفي احتجاجة عليه السلام على الناس يوم الشورى قال أنشدكم بالله هل فيكم أحد أنزل الله فيه آية التطهير على رسوله ﷺ إنما يريد الله الآية فأخذ رسول الله ﷺ كساء خيريا فضمني وفيه فاطمة والحسن والحسين عليهم السلام ثم قال يا رب هؤلاء أهل بيتي فأذهب عنهم الرجس وطهرهم تطهيرا غيري قالوا اللهم لا

Among his disputes with the people on the day of consultation (*Shūrā*) where he questioned them: "I ask you by Allah, is there anyone among you for whom Allah revealed the Verse of *Taṭhīr* to his Messenger, such that he took a *Khaybarī* cloak and encompassed me, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn, then said: 'O my Lord, these are my *Ahl al-Bayt* so remove all filth from them and completely purify them?'"

They answered: "By Allah, no (there is no one else)."⁵²

2. Lady Fāṭima عليها السلام mentioned this verse in her argument with 'Umar:

chains of transmission. The point is to show that in contradistinction to the wives, there are countless sources that the Five Personalities and the Imāms after them referenced this verse extensively as a merit in their favour.

⁵² *Al-Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi*, Vol. 4, Pg. 188.

إن من أذهب الله عنهم الرجس وطهرهم تطهيرا لا تجوز عليهم شهادة، لأنهم معصومون من كل سوء، مطهرون من كل فاحشة؛ حدثني يا عمر، من أهل هذه الآية؟! لو أن قوما شهدوا عليهم، أو على أحد منهم بشرك أو كفر أو فاحشة كان المسلمون يتبرأون منهم ويحدونهم؟! قال: نعم، وما هم وسائر الناس في ذلك إلا سواء قالت، كذبت وكفرت، ما هم وسائر الناس في ذلك سواء، لأن الله عصمهم وأنزل عصمتهم وتطهيرهم، وأذهب عنهم الرجس، فمن صدق عليهم فإنما يكذب الله ورسوله

"Indeed, those whom Allah has purged all filth and completely purified cannot be testified against (for a penal crime) because they are infallible from every evil, purified from every immorality. Tell me, O 'Umar: for those who are referenced in this verse (of purification), if a people came forward to witness against them with the accusation of polytheism, disbelief, or abomination, would the Muslims be correct in dissociating from them, and inflicting the Islāmic penal code upon them?" 'Umar replied: "Yes, because they and other people in this matter are the same." Lady Fāṭima answered: "You lie and have disbelieved! They and other people in this matter are **not** the same; for Allah has protected them and ordained their infallibility and immaculateness, purging them of all filth. Therefore, whoever believes other than them has belied Allah and His Apostle."⁵³

3. Imām Ḥasan عليه السلام utilized this verse when referring to himself in one of his speeches:

إننا أهل بيت أكرمنا الله واختارنا واصفانا وأذهب عنا الرجس وطهرنا تطهيرا والرجس هو الشك، فلا نشك في الله الحق ودينه أبدا، وطهرنا من كل أفن وغية

⁵³ *Kitāb Sulaym*, Pg. 227.

Indeed, we are the *Ahl al-Bayt* whom Allah has honoured, chosen, elected, purged from all filth, and completely purified. Filth is doubt - and we do not **ever** doubt about Allah or His religion, and He has purified us from every deficiency and deviance.⁵⁴

4. Imām Ḥusayn ؑ referenced his status as part of the *Ahl al-Bayt* in his discussion with Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam:

وبلك يا مروان إليك عني فإنك رجس وإننا أهل بيت الطهارة الذين أنزل الله عز وجل على نبيه محمد ﷺ، فقال: ﴿إِنَّمَا يَرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكَ الرَّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا﴾

Woe be to you, O Marwān! Get away from me, for indeed you are filth, and we are the *Ahl al-Bayt* of purity for whom Allah, the Highest, revealed to His Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ: 'Indeed Allah ordains thereby only to purge all filth from you, O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and purify you completely.'⁵⁵

5. Imām 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn ؑ states the following in his *Du'ā* 'Arafah:

رب صل على أطائب أهل بيته الذين اخترتهم لأمرك، وجعلتهم خزنة علمك، وحفظة دينك، وخلفاءك في أرضك، وحججك على عبادك، وطهرتهم من الرجس والدنس تطهيرا بإرادتك، وجعلتهم الوسيلة إليك والمسلك إلى جنتك

O my Lord, bless the purified of his *Ahl al-Bayt* whom You have chosen for Your affair, assigned as the keepers of Your knowledge, the protectors of Your creed, Your vicegerents on Your Earth, Your proofs upon Your servants; for You have completely purified them from all filth and dirt by Your

⁵⁴ *Al-Amālī*, al-Tūsī, Pg. 562.

⁵⁵ *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, Vol. 5, Pg. 17.

ordinance, and made them the means to You and the path to Your Heaven.⁵⁶

6. Imām Ja'far al-Šādiq عليه السلام in a discourse with Abū Bašir about the meaning of *Ahl al-Bayt* said the following:

عَنْ أَبِي بَصِيرٍ قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِأبي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عليه السلام مَنْ آلُ مُحَمَّدٍ عليه السلام قَالَ ذُرِّيَّتُهُ فَقُلْتُ أَهْلُ بَيْتِهِ قَالَ الْأَئِمَّةُ الْأَوْصِيَاءُ فَقُلْتُ مَنْ عِزَّتُهُ قَالَ أَصْحَابُ الْعَبَاءِ فَقُلْتُ مَنْ أَمَّتُهُ قَالَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا بِمَا جَاءَ بِهِ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ عليه السلام فَالتَّمَسُّكُونَ بِالتَّقْلِينَ الَّذِينَ أَمَرُوا بِالتَّمَسُّكِ بِهِمَا كِتَابِ اللَّهِ عليه السلام وَ عِزَّتِهِ أَهْلُ بَيْتِهِ الَّذِينَ أَذْهَبَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ الرُّجْسَ وَ طَهَّرَهُمْ تَطْهِيراً وَ هُمَا الْخَلِيفَتَانِ عَلَى الْأُمَّةِ بَعْدَهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ

On the authority of Abū Bašir, he said: "I asked Abū 'Abdillāh عليه السلام: 'Who are the family (*Āl*) of Muḥammad?' He answered: 'His progeny.' I asked: 'Who are his *Ahl al-Bayt*?' He replied: 'The Imāms who are his heirs.' I asked: 'Who are his family (*'itrah*)?' He answered: 'The People of the Cloak (i.e., *Aṣḥāb al-'Abā*).' Then I questioned: 'Who is his nation (*ummah*)?' He replied: 'The believers who accept that which he brought from Allah, and those who remain steadfast on the two weighty things (*al-Thaqalayn*) that they were commanded to remain steadfast upon: The Book of Allah, and his family (*'itrah*) and *Ahl al-Bayt*, from whom Allah has purged all filth and completely purified them. These are the two vicegerents upon the nation after him عليه السلام."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Ahl al-Bayt fi al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah*, Muḥammad al-Rayshahrī, Pg. 507. Of course, one may also mention the well-known incident where the 4th Imām عليه السلام encountered an old man who insulted him as he was being paraded into the streets of Damascus, and the Imām عليه السلام reminded him that they were the *Ahl al-Bayt* referred to in the Verse of *Taḥīr*.

⁵⁷ *Ma'ānī al-Akhbār*, Vol. 1, Pg. 96.

7. In a narration on the authority of Imām ‘Alī al-Riḍā عليه السلام where it is reported:

محمد بن علي التميمي قال: حدثني سيدي علي بن موسى الرضا عليه السلام عن آبائه عن علي عليه السلام عن النبي صلى الله عليه وآله أنه قال: من سره أن ينظر إلى القضيبيّ الياقوت الأحمر الذي غرسه الله صلى الله عليه وآله بيده ويكون متمسكا به فليتول عليا و الأئمة من ولده، فإنهم خيرة الله صلى الله عليه وآله وصفوته وهم المعصومون من كل ذنب و خطيئة

Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Tamīmī said that: “My master, ‘Alī ibn Musā al-Riḍā عليه السلام, narrated to me on the authority of his forefathers, on the authority of Imām ‘Alī, on the authority of the Messenger صلى الله عليه وآله [who said]: ‘Whoever is gladdened to behold and carry a staff of red ruby that Allah has planted with His Own Hands should take ‘Alī and the Imāms from his progeny as his guardians; for they are the elect and chosen ones of Allah, the Almighty, and they are those who are immaculate from every sin and error.’”⁵⁸

8. Imām Ḥasan al-‘Askarī عليه السلام where he was giving admonishment to some of his followers:

ولنا حق في كتاب الله وقربة رسول الله وتطهير من الله لا يدعيه أحد غيرنا إلا
كذاب

And for us is a right in the Book of Allah; and a kinship with the Apostle of Allah; and a purification from Allah that no one else can claim (to have been given) except a liar.⁵⁹

9. Zayd ibn ‘Alī also has a beautiful narration where he states the following (and it is interesting to note that he also uses the same argument which we discussed about in regard to the change in pronouns in the verse):

⁵⁸ *Uyūn al-Akḥbār*, Pg. 219.

⁵⁹ *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 75, Pg. 372.

قال ابو الجارود: و قال زيد بن علي بن الحسين: ان ذلك جهل من الناس الذين يزعمون انما اراد بهذه الآية ازواج النبی و قد كذبوا و اثموا، و ايم الله لو عني بها ازواج النبی لقال: ﴿ليذهب عنكن الرجس و يطهركن تطهيرا﴾ و لكن الكلام مؤنثا كما قال: و اذكرن ما يتلى في بيوتكن و لستن كاحد من النساء

Ibn Jārūd states that Zayd ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn said: “It is indeed ignorance from people who postulate that the referent of this Verse (of *Taṭhīr*) is the wives. They have uttered a lie and committed a sin. By Allah, if He had been referring to the wives he would have said: ‘To purge you (feminine plural) from filth and to purify you (feminine plural) completely.’ The speech would have been feminine just like it says: ‘And recall what of Allah’s revelation is recited in your homes’ and ‘You are not like any other women.’”⁶⁰

10. Finally, we also consider the words of Lady Zaynab ؓ where she stated the following in response to ‘Ubaydullah ibn Ziyād:

الحمد لله الذي أكرمنا بنبيه محمد وطهرنا من الرجس تطهيرا

All praise be to Allah who honoured us with His Prophet Muḥammad and purified us from all filth with utter purification.⁶¹

After the above analysis, our conclusion should speak for itself: namely that the *Ahl al-Bayt* in the Verse of *Taṭhīr* is a specific reference to the Five Personalities (the Noble Prophet ﷺ, Imām ‘Alī ؑ, Lady Fāṭima ؑ, Imām Ḥasan ؑ, and Imām Ḥusayn ؑ) exclusively, and that the wives are not included in this address. This verse is an explicit endorsement of infallibility of the *Ahl al-Bayt* as evidenced both by the context, the style of the speech, and

⁶⁰ *Ghāyat al-Marām*, Pg. 289.

⁶¹ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, Vol. 2, Pg. 115.

the many narrations which substantiate this as the import of this verse.

As the reader will observe, we proceeded with our analysis in a step-wise approach, by first examining the words themselves (lexical analysis), then how these words interact (syntactical analysis), then how the entire sentence interacts with its surrounding verses (contextual analysis), and finally how the verse should be understood in reference to the narrations (intertextual analysis). All Praise belongs to Allāh ﷻ for allowing us to complete this part of the work.

2

Answering Certain Contentions about the Verse of *Taḥhīr*

Given the theological implications of interpreting the verse as we intended to do in the previous section, critics often raise several contentions which we believe are appropriate to address here. For this section of the analysis, I am again highly indebted to Sayyid al-‘Āmili’s excellent work on this topic, whereby he examines several prominent counterarguments against the interpretation that we have adopted, then dismantles them all through insightful critique. We have divided the most common contentions into the categories below, although there are several others which he addresses in his book. The advanced reader can benefit from reviewing this material to further enhance the content covered.

Contention #1 - The Problem of Context: It Does Not Support this View

Some people claim that understanding the addressee as referring to another party which excludes the wives is contrived. They state that the context of the verse before and after this Verse of *Taḥhīr* is clearly talking about the wives; so why put a portion of a verse talking about the Five Personalities exclusively, suddenly smack in

the middle of this context? Furthermore, they claim that this type of speech is reprehensible because it goes against the style and dictates of the eloquence of the Qurān; and they argue that suddenly going on tangents in the middle of a passage results in disharmony in the text, thus indicating deficiencies in this Divine Book of Allah.

Response

First off, we state in response to this contender that the apparent context within the verses of the Qurān is by default a strong indicator of unity in meaning, and must have probative force in understanding the Qurān. However, as espoused by the *tafsīr* methodology of ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī and Āyatullāh Ja‘far Subḥānī,⁶² when two conditions are met, then the apparent context should not play a role in understanding the verse; and these conditions are as follows:

1. When the style of the verse changes suddenly, and there is no apparent link between the portion of the verses that come before it and come after it.⁶³ This can best be demonstrated by removing the portion of the verse in the middle and seeing if it renders any difference in terms of the meaning. A reader will observe that if the portion of the purification is removed from amidst the reproach of the wives between verses 33 and 34 of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, there is absolutely no change in the meaning, and the passage still remains a complete idea. This is on top of the

⁶² For advanced readers, please see the article *Naqsh-e-Siyāq dar Āye-ye-Ikmāl* by Abbās Ismā‘īlīzādeh where the views of ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī are expounded on this topic. One can also refer to Āyatullāh Subḥānī's *Mafāhīm al-Qurān: Al-‘Adl wa al-Imāmah*, Vol. 10, Pp. 168-172.

⁶³ As Āyatullāh Subḥānī notes, this should be a change on the level of both the words (*al-lafz*) and the meaning (*al-ma’nā*), which as we demonstrated for the Verse of *Tathīr* certainly holds true.

fact that there are clear contextual indicators within the verse which suggest that the address is to a group other than the wives, as we explained earlier. Another example of this phenomenon of a drastic change in verse style can be seen in Sūrah al-Mā'idah, verse 3, which is known as the Verse of the Completion of the Religion (*Āyah al-Ikmāl al-Dīn*), wherein the discussion about how the religion is now complete comes in the middle of a discussion about the rules for meat:

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أَهْلَ لِعَٰبِرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ
وَالْمُنْخَنِقَةُ وَالْمَوْقُوذَةُ وَالْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ وَالنَّطِيحَةُ وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبُعُ إِلَّا مَا ذَكَّيْتُمْ
وَمَا ذُبِحَ عَلَى التُّصْبِ وَأَنْ تَسْتَفْسِرُوا بِالْأَزْلَامِ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ فِسْقٌ ۗ الْيَوْمَ يَيسِسُ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ دِينِكُمْ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِ ۗ الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ
دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ۚ فَمَنِ
اضْطُرَّ فِي مَخْمَصَةٍ غَيْرَ مُتَجَانِفٍ لِإِثْمٍ ۖ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Forbidden to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, that over which any name other than Allah's has been invoked, and the animal which has been strangled, or beaten to death, or killed by a fall, or gored to death, or savaged by a beast of prey, except that which you [yourselves] slaughtered while it was still alive; and [forbidden to you is] all that which has been slaughtered on idolatrous altars; and [forbidden for you is] to seek to learn through divination what the future may hold in store for you: that is sinful conduct. **This day, those who are bent on denying the truth have lost all hope of [your ever forsaking] your religion: do not then hold them in awe but stand in awe of Me! This day I have perfected for you your religion, and completed My favour upon you, and have approved for you al-Islam as the religion. But as for the**

one who is driven [to what is forbidden] by dire necessity and not by an inclination to sin - then indeed, Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful. (Sūrah al-Mā'idah (5), verse 3)

It should be noted by the reader that if the bolded text was to be removed from within the verse, then the passage would still remain a complete idea; therefore, understanding this middle segment within the verse should not be dictated by its context, as there is a clear change in the style and content of the information.

2. There are clear traditions (*riwāyāt*) regarding the cause of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) which reveal that sometimes a portion of a verse was revealed in isolation, not together with the other portions of the verse. This is because the Qurān was revealed to the Prophet in a piecemeal fashion, so it is entirely possible for a certain segment to have been revealed while being disconnected from the context that it was later placed in by the Prophet ﷺ. Since there are further traditions which support this contention, one can make a case that this actually happened (*wuqū'*). Taking this in a practical light, this applies in the case of the Verse of *Taḥīr*, for the traditions indicate that it was specifically revealed for the Five Personalities without being linked to the rest of verse 33 in Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33). In fact, there are further traditions which indicate that the entire passage of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, from verses 29-33 that are reproaching the wives, was revealed on a separate occasion, as recorded by Tabarī in his *tafsīr*:

قال ابن زيد، في قول الله: ﴿تَرْجِي مَنْ تَشَاءُ مِنْهُنَّ وَتُؤْوِي إِلَيْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ﴾ الآية، قال: كان أزواجه قد تغايرن على النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، فجهرن شهرا، نزل التخيير من الله له فيهن ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجَكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ تُرِيدُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزَيَّنَّتْهَا﴾ فقرأ حتى بلغ ﴿وَلَا تَبْرَجَنَّ تَبْرَجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى﴾ فخيرهن بين أن يخترن أن يخلي سبيلهن ويسرحهن، وبين أن يقرن إن أردن الله ورسوله على أنهن أمهات المؤمنين، لا ينكحن أبدا

(‘Abd al-Raḥmān) ibn Zayd said in reference to the words of Allah: ‘You may defer whomever of them (your wives) that you wish and beckon whomever you wish’ (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), verse 51) that the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, thus he alienated himself from them for about a month. Then the Verse of *Takhyīr* (Choice) was revealed from Allah about them: ‘O Prophet, say to your wives that if they desire this world and its glitter...’ **and he read until he reached this point:** ‘and do not flaunt yourselves like the flaunting of those during the Era of Ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*)’ (verses 29-33). Therefore, he gave them the choice between dispatching them and releasing them from matrimony or remaining with him if they desire Allah and His Apostle - all the while bearing in mind that they are the Mothers of the Believers and cannot ever get married (again).⁶⁴

Another excellent example of this is the Verse of *Ikmal al-Dīn* that we referenced before, regarding which there are copious narrations from both Sunnī and Shī‘ah sources that this portion of the verse was revealed separately from the discussion about forbidden meats.⁶⁵

Therefore, the apparent textual context does not always carry probative significance, especially when both the internal and external contextual clues (*al-qarā’in al-khārijīyyah wa al-dākhiliyyah*) refute this.⁶⁶ However, this does not imply that the

⁶⁴ Please see *Tafsīr al-Tabarī* on his commentary of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), verse 29.

⁶⁵ These narrations can be reviewed here: www.al-islam.org/Verses-ghadir/Verse-ikmal-al-din-final-Verse.

⁶⁶ When there are only internal contextual clues (i.e., the stylistic change), or only external contextual clues (i.e., the narrations (*riwāyāt*)), it is more epistemologically difficult to endorse a view that goes against the apparent context. This is where some difference in the methodology of

Qurān has been arranged disharmoniously, or that these portions of the verse have been placed against the dictates of wisdom. Rather, as we discussed previously, the placement of the Verse of *Taḥhīr* specifically amidst the rebuke of the wives accentuates the degree of purity that the *Ahl al-Bayt* attained, while also establishing a stark contrast that disqualifies the wives' inclusion amidst this exclusive group. Secondly, the message of this verse matches entirely with the general theme of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, which is to protect the Prophet's ﷺ dignity and rebuke the hypocrites who seek to malign him.⁶⁷

Another point in the Divine wisdom of why the Verse of *Taḥhīr* was placed amidst rebuke of the wives is beautifully noted by Āyatullāh Ja'far Subḥānī as follows:

التاريخ يطلعنا بصفحات طويلة على موقف قريش وغيرهم من أهل البيت
عليه السلام، فإن مرسل الحسد ما زال يغلي والاتجاهات السلبية ضدهم كانت
كالشمس في رابعة النهار، فاقتضت الحكمة الإلهية أن تجعل الآية في ثنايا الآيات
المتعلقة بنساء النبي ﷺ من أجل تخفيف الحساسية ضد أهل البيت، وإن
كانت الحقيقة لا تخفى على من نظر إليها بعين صحيحة، وأن الآية تهدف إلى
جماعة أخرى غير نساء النبي ﷺ كما بيناه قبل قليل

History tells us across the span of its many pages about the stance of the Quraysh and others in reference to the *Ahl al-*

tafsīr becomes apparent between different scholars - some will adopt a more contextual-based understanding of the Verses, while others may favour a more narration-heavy approach.

⁶⁷ Since we have briefly alluded to the Verse of *Ikmal al-Din*, it should be said that similar discussions about the unique placement of that verse and why it is found in the context of prohibitions about meat have also been expounded upon by some authors in a beautiful manner. For advanced readers, two elegant papers (albeit in Persian) that we would recommend which discuss this are *Naqsh-e-Siyāq dar Āye-ye-Ikmal* by 'Abbās Ismā'ilizādeh; and *Tabyīn-e-Fahm-e-Āye-ye-Ikmal-e-Dīn bar Asās-e-Naẓm-e-Farākhatti-ye-Qurān* by Aḥmad Sulṭānābādī.

Bayt ٢٢٨. Their kettle of jealousy did not cease to boil, and the negative views the Quraysh had about them are as clear as the sun on a blazing day. Therefore, the Divine Wisdom dictated that this verse should be placed amidst verses talking about the wives of the Prophet ﷺ to mitigate the sensitivity that others had about the *Ahl al-Bayt*. However, the truth remains clear to those who look at it with a discerning eye: that this verse was meant for a different group than the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, as we have just elucidated.⁶⁸

This same argument has been advanced in reference to other verses as well; given that there was a palpable resistance against the *Ahl al-Bayt* ascending to caliphate after the Prophet ﷺ, the placement of these verses in this context accentuated their importance, while also protecting them from the hands of textual tampering (*al-tahrīf*). There are some Shī'ah scholars who suggest that the verses of the Qurān were arranged at the time of 'Uthmān, and were placed in the locations that they are now due to the discretion (*ijtihād*) of the companions.⁶⁹ However, this view is quite radical

⁶⁸ *Mafāhīm al-Qurān*, Vol. 10, Pg. 171.

⁶⁹ This theory of verses being misplaced based on the companions' *ijtihād* has been mentioned as a possibility by al-Majlisī, as well as 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī; however, this view is untenable because the Verse of *Tathīr* is technically not a separate verse, but a part of a verse. Therefore, this notion would be in line with the doctrine of Qurānic *tahrīf* which is not acceptable among the Shī'ah today. Among the opponents of the Shī'ah, these buried mistaken views within our corpus are deliberately excavated to stereotype the Shī'ah and excommunicate the sect on accusations of heresy. However, it is ironic that there are even some Sunnī scholars who have endorsed the view that the companions manipulated the Verse of *Tathīr*, such as the famous Ḥanafī Deobandī commentator (*mufasssir*) and narrator (*muḥaddith*) Waḥīd al-Zamān who says the following:

as it completely dismantles the probative force of the Qurānic context in totality, which is unanimously accepted by the orthodox of all sects; a more detailed discussion on this point can be found in the work of Sayyid al-‘Āmilī.⁷⁰

Finally, regarding the point of view that understanding this verse in the matter that we have expounded contradicts the dictates of eloquence: in fact, this particular rhetorical style known as digression (*al-istiṭrād*) is employed amply in the Qurān where the pronouns are changed, thus the addressees change in turn. Consider the following verse which highly resembles the Verse of *Taḥīr* and shows that this type of parenthetical digression is common in Qurānic parlance; notice that the first half of the verse is addressed specifically to the Prophet, but then the pronouns and style of address change suddenly to reference the believers:

صحیح مرفوع حدیثیں اس کی تائید کرتی ہیں اور جب آنحضرت صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم نے خود بیان کر دیا ہے کہ میرے گھر والے یہ لوگ ہیں تو اس کا قبول کرنا واجب ہے اور ایک قرینہ اس کا یہ ہے کہ اس آیت کے اول اور آخر جمع مؤنث حاضر سے خطاب ہے اور اس میں جمع مذکر کی ضمیر سے ایسا معلوم ہوتا ہے کہ یہ آیت ان آیتوں کے بیچ میں رکھ دی گئی ہے جن میں ازواج مطہرات سے خطاب تھا اور صحابہ کرام نے اپنے اجتہاد سے ایسا کی

“The correct and well-connected (*marfū*) Prophetic traditions support the view (that the term *Ahl al-Bayt* is specific to the Five Personalities); for when the Prophet declared that the members of my Household are only these (five), accepting and believing this becomes obligatory. Another indicator is the fact that the pronouns which surround this Verse are addressed in the feminine plural, while this Verse uses the masculine plural. Therefore, it is realized that this Verse was interpolated amidst the Verses that were addressing the pristine wives of the Prophet, **and that the companions placed it here out of their own discretion (ijtihad).**” (*Tafsīr al-Wahidī*, Pg. 549, footnote 7)

⁷⁰ See his book *Ahl al-Bayt fī Āyah al-Taḥīr*, Pp. 107-110.

﴿إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَهِيداً وَمُبَشِّراً وَنَذِيراً لِّتُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَتُعَزِّرُوهُ وَتُوَقِّرُوهُ وَتُسَبِّحُوهُ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلاً﴾

Indeed, we have sent you (O Prophet) as a witness (*shāhid*), a bringer of good news (*bashīr*), and a warner (*nadhīr*) - in order that you (O believers) believe in Allah and His Messenger, and support him and respect him (the Prophet), and glorify Him (Allah) by morning and by evening.⁷¹

It should also be said that the Qurān not necessarily being congruent with its apparent context has been alluded to in many narrations from the Imāms of *Ahl al-Bayt* عليه السلام:

عن جابر قال: قال أبو عبد الله عليه السلام يا جابر! إن للقرآن بطناً وللبطن ظهراً، وليس شئ أبعد من عقول الرجال منه، إن الآية لينزل أولها في شئ وأوسطها في شئ، وآخرها في شئ، وهو كلام متصرف على وجوه.

It has been narrated by Jābir (al-Ju'fī) that Abū 'Abdillāh (Imām al-Ṣādiq) عليه السلام said: "O Jābir! The Qurān has an inner meaning, and that inner meaning has a superficial (reading). There is nothing further from the intellects of human beings than it (the Qurān). Indeed, the beginning of the verse can be regarding one thing, its middle about something (else), and its end about another thing; all the while, it is a (unified) speech amenable to multiple imports."⁷²

Contention #2 - The Verse Includes all of the *Banū Hāshim*

As we discussed in the previous sections, the view of Zayd ibn Arqam was that the term *Ahl al-Bayt* subsumes all the relatives of the Prophet ﷺ, not just the Five Personalities. This is a contention

⁷¹ Qurān, Sūrah al-Fath (48), verses 8-9.

⁷² *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, Vol. 27, Pg. 204.

which has been raised by some people by taking the word “*al-bayt*” in *Ahl al-Bayt* to refer to the Ka‘bah, referencing how “*al-bayt*” is used in other places in the Qurān. Given that the Banū Hāshim were the caretakers of the Ka‘bah and the Holy Sanctuary (*al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*), they hypothesize that this verse incorporates all the Banū Hāshim. Even further, some rely on verse 34 of Sūrah al-Anfāl to suggest that “*ahl al-bayt*” is a general term which even includes the *muttaqūn* (i.e., those imbued with God-consciousness).⁷³

Response

The view of Zayd ibn Arqam needs to be contextualized properly: firstly, in the narrations from Zayd, he is not being asked about the meaning of “*Ahl al-Bayt*” in the Verse of *Taḥīr*, but about its meaning in *Hadīth al-Thaqalayn*. Therefore, it does not necessarily follow that his wider definition of the term “*Ahl al-Bayt*” applies equally to the specific use of this term in the Verse of *Taḥīr*. As we discussed before, in that verse, the word “*al-bayt*” implies the house of Prophethood, or the house in which those specific Five Personalities had been in when the verse was revealed, and thus is much more specific than the meaning of “the house of kinship.” Secondly, this should be understood as a form of discretion (*ijtihād*) from Zayd, as it is not narrated directly from the Prophet ﷺ; therefore, this portion of his statement does not hold much weight when compared to the clear textual proofs (*nuṣūṣ*) from the

⁷³ This verse states:

﴿وَمَا لَهُمْ آلَا يُعَذِّبُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَهُمْ يَصُدُّونَ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَمَا كَانُوا أَوْلِيَاءَهُ إِنْ أَوْلِيَائِهِمْ إِلَّا الْمُتَّقُونَ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

And why should Allah not punish them when they block (entry) to the Sacred Sanctuary while they are not its guardians? Its (true) guardians are none but those with God-consciousness; but most of them do not know.

Messenger himself when he says that "*Ahl al-Bayt*" is limited to the Five specified Personalities. If this view of Zayd about the *Ahl al-Bayt* was correct, then the Prophet of Allah ﷺ would certainly have included the family of 'Abbās, 'Aqīl, and Ja'far under the cloak with him.

Regarding the interpretation of "*al-bayt*" here as the Ka'bah, this is a far-fetched interpretation because there are no contextual clues within the verse to suggest this meaning of "*al-bayt*;" and also there are no Prophetic narrations which support this interpretation of "*ahl al-bayt*." Just because the word "*al-bayt*" is used in the Qurān to refer to the Ka'bah in other verses, does not mean that it has the same connotation in other contexts.

Some further general remarks on the implausibility of this interpretation are also warranted as follows:

1. As we discussed in our analysis about the syntax of this verse, the wording specifically substantiates infallibility; therefore, it follows that its referents cannot be Banū Hāshim as a whole, since there were clear disbelievers and sinners among them. Otherwise, the likes of Abū Lahab would also be included in this verse, even though we know there is an entire Sūrah revealed about him and his wife, and how they will burn in the blazing fire.

2. It is unclear how a series of specific prescriptions upon the wives of the Prophet ﷺ has any relevance to the purification of all believers, or even to all the Banū Hāshim in general. Furthermore, the exclusivization inherent in the syntax of this verse would be rendered futile (*laghwī*) if "*Ahl al-Bayt*" in this verse referred to all the God-conscious ones (*muttaqūn*) in general. More concretely, it would be like Allah telling the believers: "I am only prescribing these specific commands on the wives to especially remove filth from you and purify you completely, O people of God-consciousness!" It would not make sense for the All-Knowing Creator to refer to them all. Thus, we hope it is clear how nebulous an interpretation this is.

Contention #3 - This Verse does not Prove Infallibility

Others come forward and state that this verse has nothing to do with infallibility and should not be understood in this way; they mention several counterarguments as below:

1. They allude to several verses in the Qurān which discuss purification in a manner that resembles the Verse of *Taṭhīr*, specifically referring to the believers in general, or the companions at Badr. The verses they reference are as follows:

﴿مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَكِنْ يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ وَلِيُنِمْ
نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ﴾

...Allah does not intend to impose any hardship on you, but intends to purify you, and bestow upon you the full measure of His blessings, so that perhaps you may be grateful. (Sūrah al-Mā'idah (5), verse 6)

﴿إِذْ يُغَشِّيكُمُ الْتُّعَاسُ أَمَنَةً مِنْهُ وَيُنْزِلُ عَلَيْكُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً
لِّيُطَهِّرَكُم بِهِ، وَيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمْ رِجْزَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيَرْبِطَ عَلَى قُلُوبِكُمْ
وَيُنَبِّتَ بِهِ الْأَفْئَادَ﴾

[Remember how it was] when He caused inner calm to enfold you, as an assurance from Him, and sent down upon you water from the skies, so that He might purify you thereby and free you from Satan's unclean whisperings and strengthen your hearts, and thus make firm your steps. (Sūrah al-Anfāl (8), verse 11)

These people state that since the verses of the Qurān which speak about purification in the case of the companions are understood in an ordinary manner, then the purification as expounded in the Verse of *Taṭhīr* should also be understood in an ordinary way. In

short, there is no reason why this particular verse should be taken to imply infallibility.

2. They further state that the verse uses the present form (*muḍāri'*) "*yurīdu*" which applies only to the present and future, therefore this means that the *Ahl al-Bayt* only became protected from sins in a time-limited way when Allah's ordinance dictated it.

3. Some like al-Ālūsī propose that the verse is conditional (*fī quwwah al-sharṭiyyah*) and means: "O wives of the Prophet, Allah only prescribed these ordinances so that if you follow them, Allah will remove all filth from you and completely purify you."

4. Others say that purification from sins by necessity must imply an exposure to sins first, otherwise purification becomes meaningless and unnecessary (*taḥṣīl al-ḥāṣil*).

Response

We will answer these questions in order respectively as follows:

1. The verses in question (Sūrah al-Mā'idah (5), verse 6; and Sūrah al-Anfāl (8), verse 11) are specifically addressed in reference to the rules of ritual ablution (*wuḍhū'*), and rain falling on the companions after the battle of Badr to remove their external filth. There is **nothing** in the context of those passages which suggests purification from moral and spiritual vices; in contrast, the verses surrounding the Verse of *Taṭhīr* are expounding the ethical obligations which are incumbent upon the wives of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Furthermore, there is a stark contrast in the categorical phraseology negating uncleanness and affirming purification seen in Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, verse 33 (such as the use of *lām al-istighrāq* in *al-rijs* and the use of *al-maf'ūl al-muṭlaq*), as we have already elucidated upon in the syntactical discussion.

Even further, the various statements made by the *Aṣḥāb al-Kisā'* and the Imāms of *Ahl al-Bayt* indicate that this verse was taken as a merit which affirmed their infallibility and candidacy to lead the

Muslim nation (*ummah*). We add here two other traditions narrated from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ from Sunnī sources:

عن ابن عباس قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم إن الله قسم الخلق قسمين، فجعلني في خيرهما قسماً. فذلك قوله ﴿وَأَصْحَابُ الْيَمِينِ﴾ [الواقعة: ٢٧] و ﴿أَصْحَابُ الشَّمَالِ﴾ [الواقعة: ٤١] فأنا من أصحاب اليمين، وأنا خير أصحاب اليمين، ثم جعل القسمين أثلاثاً، فجعلني في خيرها ثلثاً، فذلك قوله ﴿وَأَصْحَابُ الْمِئْمَنَةِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الْمِئْمَنَةِ وَأَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ وَالسَّابِقُونَ﴾ [الواقعة: ٨ - ١٠] فأنا من السابقين، وأنا خير السابقين، ثم جعل الأثلاث قبائل، فجعلني في خيرها قبيلة، وذلك قوله ﴿وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوباً وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ﴾ [الحجرات: ١٣] وأنا أتقى ولد آدم، وأكرمهم على الله تعالى ولا فخر. ثم جعل القبائل بيوتاً، فجعلني في خيرها بيتاً، فذلك قوله ﴿إِنَّمَا يَرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيراً﴾ فَأَنَا وَأَهْلُ

بَيْتِي مُطَهَّرُونَ مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ

Ibn 'Abbās narrates from the Prophet ﷺ that: Indeed, Allah divided creation into two groups, and made me in the better of the two; and these are the words of Allah: 'And the companions of the right hand...' (Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah (56), verse 27); and 'The companions of the left hand' (Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah (56), verse 41). I am from the companions of the right hand - rather I am the best of them. Then Allah divided the two groups into thirds, and placed me in the best third; and these are the words of Allah: 'And the companions of the right, how blessed they are; and the companions of the left how wretched they are; and the foremost, are the foremost' (Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah (56), verses 8-10). Therefore, I am among the foremost, rather I am the best of the foremost. Then Allah divided these thirds into tribes, and made me in the best tribe; these are the words of Allah: 'And We made you into tribes and nations that you may recognize one another; the most noble of you with Allah are the most righteous (God-conscious ones)' (Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt (49),

verse 13). I am the best of the sons of Adam, and the most noble of them with Allah, without being boastful. Then He made these tribes into houses, and made me (to reside) in the best of houses, and these are the words of Allah: 'Allah only ordains thereby to purge all filth from you, O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and completely purify you.' **Therefore, I and my *Ahl al-Bayt* are purified from all sins.**

عن قتادة رضي الله عنه في قوله ﴿إِنَّمَا يَرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا﴾ قال: هم أهل بيت طهرهم الله من السوء، واختصهم برحمته قال: وحدث الضحاك بن مزاحم رضي الله عنه، أن نبي الله صلى الله عليه وسلم كان يقول نحن أهل بيت طهرهم الله من شجرة النبوة، وموضع الرسالة، ومخفاف الملائكة، وبيت الرحمة، ومعدن العلم

On the authority of Qutādah in reference to His (Allah's) words: "Allah only ordains thereby to purge all filth from you, O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and completely purify you." He states: **"They are a Prophetic Household whom Allah has purified from evil and specified for His Mercy."** He (then) said: "Al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim narrated that the Prophet ﷺ used to say: **"We are a Prophetic Household whom Allah has purified: from the Tree of Prophethood, the Locus of Messengership, the Conflux of the Angels, the House of Mercy, and the Source of Knowledge."**⁷⁴

Considering the above, it becomes clear that both intellectual ('*aqli*) and traditionist (*naqli*) sources support the thesis that this Verse of *Taḥṭīr* is specifically referencing the *Ahl al-Bayt* being categorically protected from all filth and purified from all sins.

2. Arguing that the intention (*irādah*) of Allāh ﷻ is a time-limited phenomenon given it is in the present tense is clear

⁷⁴ Both narrations can be found in al-Suyūṭī's *Durr al-Manthūr* under the commentary of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), verse 33.

ignorance in reference to the usage of this word in the Qurānic context. It is often the case that the present tense is used with a past tense significance to imply permanence and renewed consistency (*al-istimrāriyyah*).⁷⁵ Secondly, if the word *irādah* here implies purification only for a temporary period of time, then the specialization (*al-khuṣṣiyyah*) of the entire verse becomes futile (*laghwī*); for every person is purified from sins for some period of time in their lives. Therefore, what is the distinction of the *Ahl al-Bayt* in their being purified from filth for a temporary period when every other person also shares this attribute? Furthermore, in the *ḥadīth* quoted from Ibn ‘Abbās on the authority of the Prophet ﷺ [see point 1], the Prophet ﷺ did not say: “I and my *Ahl al-Bayt* will/shall be purified from sins.” He stated this as a binding attribute of the *Ahl al-Bayt* which refutes the time-dependent nature of the intention (*irādah*).

3. The conditional nature of this verse is untenable because of the points we have already discussed above. As ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā‘ī states in his *tafsīr*, if the meaning here is simply: “O *Ahl al-Bayt*, you will be purified if you follow the commands which Allah has laid out for you,” then the meritorious and exclusive nature of this Verse of *Taḥīr* is entirely undermined; for every Muslim, in addition to the *Ahl al-Bayt*, attains a degree of relative purity through following Allah’s commands.

4. This Verse of *Taḥīr*, by the admission of nearly all commentators, includes Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. In this context, stating that the verse implies purity only after being touched by filth first would imply that the Prophet could commit sins, however this negates his infallibility. How can anyone dare question the

⁷⁵ For instance, consider Qur’ān, Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ (28), verse 5:

﴿وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ﴾

And We willed to bestow Our favour upon those [very people] who were oppressed in the land, and make them leaders (in faith); and make them the inheritors [to Pharaoh’s glory].

infallibility of the final Messenger? Imāms Ḥasan عليه السلام and Ḥusayn عليه السلام are included in the import of this verse and they were children at the time when the Event of the Cloak took place, therefore they were indubitably unsullied by sin by virtue of their not having reached the age of maturity at the time of revelation of this verse.

Furthermore, this type of reasoning, although seemingly logical, falls flat on its face when compared to other verses of the Qurān. For instance, consider the following verses:

﴿رَسُولٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ يَتْلُو صُحُفًا مُّطَهَّرَةً﴾

A Messenger from Allah, reciting purified pages.⁷⁶

﴿كَذَلِكَ لِنُضْرِبَ عَنْهُ الظُّلُمَاتِ وَالْفَحْشَاءَ﴾

And thus (it was) that We repelled from him all evil and debauchery.⁷⁷

﴿وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ﴾

And they will have therein purified wives and will reside therein forever.⁷⁸

Therefore, if this assumption were true, then it would necessitate that the angelic scrolls upon which the scriptures were written were unclean before becoming purified. It would imply also that Yūsuf, who is clearly identified as preserving himself away from all temptation from Zulaykha, was a filthy individual before Allah warded off evil and debauchery from him (may Allah protect us from such abomination)! It would imply that the heavenly maidens of Paradise had been unclean and were rendered pure afterwards.

Thus, it becomes clear that proposing the necessity of filthiness before purity is only a type of conceptual abstraction, not

⁷⁶ Qurān, Sūrah al-Bayyinah (98), verse 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Sūrah Yūsuf (12), verse 24.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), verse 25.

grounded in reality. In this context, purging filth (*al-rijs*) from the *Ahl al-Bayt* has the following meanings (*tawjihāt*), away from any notion that they were contaminated prior with sins:

1. What is being negated by this verse is the very possibility (*al-iḥtimāl*) or conception (*al-wahm*) of filth ever sulling the *Ahl al-Bayt*'s sacred personalities.
2. This refers to them being immune from the whispers of Shayṭān, even though he promised to deviate everyone except Allah's chosen servants.⁷⁹
3. *Al-rijs* has also been defined in some narrations, as well in the Qurān, as doubts about the religion of Allah; therefore, the reference of removing filth and purification could refer to this in particular.
4. Rather than being a reference to impurity itself, this could refer to the causes/factors which serve as a preamble to impurity and Allah's wrath (*asbāb al-rijs*).⁸⁰

⁷⁹ As in the verse where Shayṭān tells Allah ﷻ in the Qurān:

«قَالَ رَبِّ إِنَّمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُخْلَصِينَ»

My Lord since You deviated me I will make evil seem fair to them on Earth, and I will deviate them all - except, from among them, Your chosen servants (*al-mukhlaṣīn*). (Sūrah al-Ḥijr (15), verses 39-40)

⁸⁰ As is referenced in the Qurān where Allāh ﷻ states:

«وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الْفَوَاحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَمَا بَطَنَ»

...And do not approach the depravities (*al-fawāhish*): what is apparent of them and what is concealed (of them)... (Sūrah al-An'ām (6), verse 151)

Contention #4 - This Verse is Actually about the Wives, and *Ḥadīth al-Kisā'* is Just a Particularization (*al-Miṣdāq*)

This contention is particularly interesting and clever, having been proposed by several prominent Sunnī commentators, including Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Ālūsī, Shāh Waliullāh Dehlavī, and 'Adnān Ibrāhīm.⁸¹ They state that:

1. If the Verse of *Taḥīr* was clearly revealed about the Five Personalities, then there would have been no need for the Prophet ﷺ to put them under the cloak in the first place and then beseech Allah for their purification. They state that the Prophet ﷺ refused to let Umm Salamah (and his other wives) enter the cloak with the *Ahl al-Bayt* - not because they were excluded, but because they were already included by default - so putting them under the cloak would have been like asking Allāh ﷻ for something that had already been granted (*taḥṣīl al-ḥāṣil*). This goes against the etiquettes of supplication to Allah.

2. They also utilize a famous rule in Fundamentals of Jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*) known as *العبرة بعموم اللفظ لا بخصوص السبب* "the import is based on the generality of the expression, and not the specific circumstance of revelation" (*al-'ibrah bi 'umūm al-lafẓ lā bi khuṣūṣ al-sabab*). In other words, they state that even though the Verse of Purification was revealed specifically for the Five People who were gathered underneath the cloak, this does not mean that it excludes the wives, especially since the word "*ahl*" may conventionally include the wives of a man. They further reference the narrations of 'Ikrimah and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān to suggest that including the wives in the import of this verse had precedent in the early generations of the Muslims.

⁸¹ For those interested, please reference 'Adnān Ibrāhīm's Arabic lecture on this topic at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5IAlhWRgU0

Response

Given that these are in fact two separate contentions, we will address them respectively as follows:

a. The first argument is completely dismantled by bearing in mind the following points:

1. As per many *ḥadīth*, the Verse of *Taḥīr* was revealed as a response to the Prophet's ﷺ supplication for the Five Personalities; if there was even a shred of evidence that the cause of revelation for this verse was an event other than the *Ḥadīth* of the Cloak, then this contention may have been valid. However, the *ḥadīth* literature is completely clear about this issue.⁸² Therefore, there is no evidence that the cause of revelation subsumed the wives.

2. Why would Umm Salamah have asked to go under the cloak if she was part of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and this was already a foregone conclusion? In fact, Umm Salamah's inquiry about her inclusion proves that the term "*Ahl al-Bayt*" was not understood to include her, otherwise her even asking this question becomes futile. Furthermore, if the wives were already included in the term "*Ahl al-Bayt*," then why did the Prophet ﷺ not say that in the *ḥadīth*? Instead, the Prophet ﷺ in nearly all the narrations stated that she was righteous, without affirming her inclusion.⁸³

3. Asking Allah for something which has already been granted is not vain or futile (*taḥṣīl al-ḥāṣil*); otherwise, the Prophet's ﷺ recitation of *Sūrah al-Fātiḥa* wherein one beseeches Allah to "guide us to the Straight Path" should also be meaningless, given that he is the foremost on Allah's ﷻ guidance! Therefore, the supplication of the Prophet ﷺ for those Five was merely to request continued Divine Providence upon them (*al-istimrāriyyah*), and there is nothing futile about that. As the traditions affirm, it is beneficial to

⁸² For a review of these *aḥādīth*, please see al-Abṭāḥī's *Āyah al-Taḥīr fī Aḥādīth al-Farīqayn*, Vol. 2, Pp. 151-159.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Pp. 279-298.

supplicate to Allāh ﷻ, even for things which are taken for granted.⁸⁴ Therefore, the question of why the Prophet did not allow his wives under the cloak remains a powerful counterargument against this claim.

b. In reference to the second contention that the wives should be included in the term *Ahl al-Bayt*, while the *Aṣḥāb al-Kisā'* are just a specialized application of the verse (*miṣdāq*), we bring the reader's attention to the following critical points:

1. The application of this principle as espoused in the principles of jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*) requires that the wording under consideration should be general, not specific. This critical point has been expounded beautifully by the Shāfi'ī jurist, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, as follows:

يجب أن يتنبه للفرق بين دلالة السياق والقرائن على تخصيص العام وعلى مراد
المتكلم وبين ورود العام على سبب، ولا تجري مجرى واحد فإن مجرد ورود
العام على سبب لا يخصصه، وأما السياق والقرائن [فإنها] الدالة على المراد

It is necessary to pay attention to the difference between (i) how context and textual indicators specialize a general import, thereby specifying the intention of the speaker, and (ii) a general statement narrated for a certain event (*sabab*). These are not governed by a single rule; for a general statement narrated during a certain event does not necessarily specify it. However, context and textual indicators certainly lead one to the specifically intended import.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ As the famous Prophetic *Ḥadīth* affirms:

سلوا الله عز وجل ما بدا لكم من حوائجكم، حتى شسع النعل فإنه إن لم يسره لم يتيسر
Ask Allah, the Almighty, for every one of your needs that you can imagine, even for the strap of your sandal; for if He does not facilitate it, then it will not be facilitated. (*Mizān al-Ḥikmah*, Vol. 2, Pg. 782)

⁸⁵ *Kitāb al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir*, Vol. 2, Pg. 135.

Bearing this in mind, we turn to the Verse of *Taḥhīr*. As we previously discussed, there are in fact several contextual indications within this verse that the term “*Ahl al-Bayt*” is specific and reserved for a very meritorious group, not of a general import (please refer to the syntactical discussion). Therefore, the application of this generally accepted principle is not appropriate, as it is fallacious to characterize this Verse of Purification as bearing a general import in the first place.

1. As per *Ḥadīth al-Kisāʾ*, the Prophet ﷺ already issued a glaring disqualification to his wives’ being part of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ﷺ. This added traditionist (*naqli*) evidence specifies (*takhṣiṣ*) the term, and hence negates the notion that the term “*Ahl al-Bayt*” refers to the Prophet’s relatives or wives generally.

2. The very narrations (*akhbār*) that this group uses to include the wives in the Prophet ﷺ narrated by ‘Ikrimah and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān invalidate their argument, because these individuals claimed that the Verse of *Taḥhīr* was specifically revealed for the wives and was not of a general import at all. Furthermore, it is well-established that ‘Ikrimah was a Khārijite, and that Muqātil ibn Sulaymān was known to be a liar.⁸⁶ In fact, the existence of these hateful individuals, who viewed the verse as excluding these Noble Five Personalities, implies a recognition that the verse indeed carries dangerous theological implications for them - this is especially considering how ‘Ikrimah would challenge others to a mutual imprecation (*mubāhalah*), claiming that this verse was specific to the wives of the Prophet ﷺ exclusively. Why would an individual like ‘Ikrimah issue a challenge of this stature for a verse that carried no theological significance whatsoever?!

⁸⁶ Please see the detailed discussion about this in al-‘Āmili’s book *Ahl al-Bayt fī Āyah al-Taḥhīr*, Pp. 166-170.

Contention #5 - The Actions of the Wives have No Bearing on the Prophetic Household

The next contention attacks the very premise we set to establish in interpreting this verse. This camp counter argues that the actions of the wives of the Prophet should not have any bearing on the purification of these Five Personalities. In other words, they state that every person is responsible for their own deeds, and they quote verses in the Qurān which clearly state that: "No person shall bear the sins of another."⁸⁷ Therefore, they state that Allāh ﷻ rebuking the wives of the Prophet ﷺ to preserve the integrity of the *Ahl al-Bayt* is not logical because the *Ahl al-Bayt* are not affected by the sins of the wives. In turn, they suggest that this is a very contrived and unsavory way to interpret this verse.

Response

From its very outset, this argument is weak because it fails to explain why there is a change in pronoun in this Verse of *Taṭhīr* which includes the menfolk - simply put, if this argument was correct, then the change in pronouns would be rendered meaningless because how are menfolk purified by the actions of the Prophet's wives except in a secondary manner? Even if we

⁸⁷ They reference the following verses:

﴿وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۚ وَإِن تَدْعُ مُثْقَلَةٌ إِلَىٰ جُنْدِيهَا لَا يُحْمَلُ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَىٰ﴾

No soul burdened with sin will bear the burden of another. And if a sin-burdened soul cries for help with its burden, none of it will be carried—even by a close relative. (Sūrah Fāṭir (35), verse 18)

﴿وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ﴾

...that no soul shall bear the burden of another. (Sūrah al-Najm (53), verse 38)

were to exclude some of the Five Personalities from the import, it is nearly unanimous among Muslim scholars that Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is included in the address of *Ahl al-Bayt* in this Verse of *Taḥīr*. How is the purity of the Prophet ﷺ affected by the compliance of his wives to Allah's commands, except in the indirect sense of preserving his reputation?

In fact, the goal is to clear the *Ahl al-Bayt* ﷺ from the aspersions of that superficial and hypocritical society which surrounded them, whereby the deeds of the Prophet's wives would have had an impact on how they were socially perceived as their relations by marriage. This was an especially salient reality amidst an environment wherein the enemies were seeking any means possible to cast aspersions upon the final Messenger ﷺ and his Purified Family. Therefore, in order to close this door upon them, Allah rebuked the wives of the Prophet ﷺ only to elucidate that the possible misdeeds which they commit shall never reflect upon the *Ahl al-Bayt*; and by ordaining these commandments, Allāh ﷻ thus completely dismantled the means by which diseased hearts could possibly disparage or criticize the Prophet's family.

In fact, this is precisely the reason why the wives are given double the reward for their obedience: once for their own piety, and another for reflecting a spirit of piety onto the Five; likewise, their punishment is doubled: once for their own transgressions, and the other for disparaging the perceived image of the Noble Prophetic Household.

Furthermore, the need to be distanced from corrupt environs and associates is perfectly in line with the Qurānic ethos. For example, we find the following verse describing how Allāh ﷻ desired to purify Prophet ʿĪsā عليه السلام:

﴿إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يٰعِيسَى ابْنِي مَتْوًىكِ وَرَافِعَكَ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهِّرَكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا...﴾

(Mention) when Allah said: 'O 'Īsā! Indeed, I will take you and raise you to Myself; and purify you from those who disbelieve.'⁸⁸

Notice here that Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ was being purified by Allāh ﷻ from the entourage of those who surrounded him, and those who disbelieved in his message. This verse establishes that even though a Prophet may not be spiritually corrupted by the disbelief or sins of those who are around them, Allāh ﷻ still seeks to purify and raise them away from the milieu of vice in which they find themselves in. In the same token, look at the following verse:

«الْحَبِيبَاتُ لِلْحَبِيبِينَ وَالْحَبِيبُونَ لِلْحَبِيبَاتِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتُ لِلطَّيِّبِينَ وَالطَّيِّبُونَ لِلطَّيِّبَاتِ»

Wicked women are for wicked men, and wicked men for wicked women; and pure women are for pure men, and pure men are for pure women.⁸⁹

We see this theme repeated in the Qurān quite frequently, whereby Allah seeks to purify the believers from those who surround them from among the hypocrites and disbelievers:

«مَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَذَرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَىٰ مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ حَتَّىٰ يَمِيزَ الْخَبِيثَ مِنَ الطَّيِّبِ»

It does not behoove Allah that He should leave the believers in that state in which you are in until He differentiates the wicked from the pure.⁹⁰

Therefore, when Allāh ﷻ seeks to purify the ordinary believers from the hypocrites among them, does it not follow by the

⁸⁸ Qurān, Sūrah Āle 'Imrān (3), verse 55.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Sūrah al-Nūr (24), verse 26.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Sūrah Āle 'Imrān (3), verse 179.

principle of the stronger argument (*al-awlawiyyah al-qat'iyyah*) that He would seek to purify the Prophetic Household even more so than anyone else? Would He not make sure that the *Ahl al-Bayt* ﷺ are purified from the possible misdeeds of those who have only married into the family, but do not uphold the same noble principles? Therefore, it is in this spirit that Allāh ﷻ instructs the wives of the Prophet ﷺ with these stringent commandments, whereby they are expected to socially interact with extra decorum due to their relationship with the Prophet ﷺ, as an extension his Noble Family.

Contention #6 - What about the Other Uses of *Ahl al-Bayt* in the Qurān?

There are those such as the popular modern Salafī polemicist ‘Uthmān al-Khamīs, as well as his predecessor Ibn Taymiyyah who attack the notion that the *Ahl al-Bayt* is a specific term referencing the Five Personalities. They reference several verses of the Qurān wherein the word “*ahl*” is used to include the wives, such as the following:

﴿فَلَمَّا قَضَىٰ مُوسَى الْأَجَلَ وَسَارَ بِأَهْلِهِ ۖ آنَسَ مِنْ جَانِبِ الطُّورِ نَارًا قَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ امْكُثُوا إِنِّي آنَسْتُ نَارًا لَّعَلِّي آتِيكُم مِّنْهَا بِخَبَرٍ أَوْ جَذْوَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَصْطَلُونَ﴾

And when Mūsā had fulfilled his term and was wandering with his family [in the desert], he perceived a fire on the slope of Mount Sinai; [so] he said to his family: ‘Wait here. Indeed, I perceive a fire [far away]; perhaps I may bring you

from there some tiding, or [at least] a burning wood from the fire, so that you might warm yourselves.⁹¹

﴿وَاسْتَبَقَا الْبَابَ وَقَدَّتْ قَمِيصَهُ مِنْ دُبُرٍ وَأَلْفَيَا سَيِّدَهَا لَدَى الْبَابِ قَالَتْ مَا جَزَاءُ مَنْ أَرَادَ بِأَهْلِكَ سُوءًا إِلَّا أَنْ يُسْجَنَ أَوْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ﴾

And they both (Yūsuf and Zulaykha) raced with one another to the door, and she tore his shirt from behind, and they met her husband at the door. She said: 'What shall be the recompense of one who wishes evil to your family (*ahl*), except that he be imprisoned or (receives) a painful punishment?⁹²

﴿فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَهُ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ﴾

Thus, we saved him (Lūt) and his family (*ahl*), except for his wife, who was among those who remained behind (with the evil doers).⁹³

In all of these verses, the Arabic word "*ahl*" included the wives of the respective Prophets, so the argument is: "Why cannot the word "*ahl*" in "*Ahl al-Bayt*" also include the wives of the Prophet? When the Qurān affirms this usage elsewhere, what is the barrier to including the wives in the Verse of *Taṭhīr*?"

These individuals also reference two other verses in the Qurān where the word *Ahl al-Bayt* is used, stating that these verses substantiate the inclusion of the wives as well:

⁹¹ Qur'ān, Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ (28), verse 29. The argument which is used is that this *ḥadīth* clearly indicates that Prophet Mūsā's wife was present with him. It is unclear to me how someone can utilize this argument based on a *ḥadīth*, and then completely discard the *Ḥadīth* of the Cloak which clearly disqualifies the wives as being part of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

⁹² Ibid., Sūrah Yūsuf (12), verse 25.

⁹³ Ibid., Sūrah al-A'rāf (7), verse 83.

﴿وَحَرَمْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَرَاضِعَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَقَالَتْ هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ بَيْتٍ يَكْفُلُونَهُ لَكُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُ نَاصِحُونَ﴾

And We prevented from him (all) wet nurses; and [when his sister came to know about this] she said: ‘Shall I guide you to a family (*ahl bayt*) who might rear him for you, and look after him with good will?’⁹⁴

﴿قَالُوا أَتَعْجَبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ ۖ رَحِمْتُ اللَّهَ وَبَرَكْنَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ ۖ إِنَّهُ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ﴾

They (the angels) said: ‘Are you (Sārah) amazed at the decree of Allah? May the mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you, O people of the house (*ahl al-bayt*)! Indeed, He is All-Praiseworthy, All-Glorious.’⁹⁵

They state that this proves the word “*Ahl al-Bayt*” can incorporate the wives since the mother of Mūsā ؑ, and the wife of Ibrāhīm ؑ, Sārah ؑ, were included in these verses. For them, this interpretation of *Ahl al-Bayt* as including the wives is more in line with the spirit of the Qurān, and arguments about *Ahl al-Bayt* excluding the wives are frankly not Qurānically grounded.

Response

In answering this contention, we will divide our response into two parts. The first is specifically about the use of the word “*ahl*” as referenced by the contender. As we discussed in our word-by-word discussion, the word *ahl* is extremely general and non-specific; therefore, utilizing verses where wives are construed as being part of one’s *ahl* is quite imprecise, especially when the expression being referenced in the Verse of *Taḥīr* is “*Ahl al-Bayt*” and not just

⁹⁴ Qurān, Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ (28), verse 12.

⁹⁵ Ibid., Sūrah Hūd (11), verse 73.

"*ahl*." This is notwithstanding the fact that there are other verses where the word *ahl* is used, and the wife is obviously not included, such as the following:

﴿وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ شِقَاقَ بَيْنِهِمَا فَابْعَثُوا حَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهِ وَحَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا
إِنْ يُرِيدَا إِصْلَاحًا يُوَفِّقِ اللَّهُ بَيْنَهُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا خَبِيرًا﴾

And if you fear dissension between the two of them, then appoint a mediator from his family (*ahlihī*), and another mediator from hers (*ahlihā*). If they both desire reconciliation, then Allah will restore harmony between them. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.⁹⁶

In the above verse, the word *ahl* is used in a manner which excludes one's wife. Therefore, it becomes clear that this word is quite generic and may or may not include one's wives depending on the context, and the circumstances (*qarā'in*) which surround its usage. Bearing these considerations in mind, the first three verses which the contender uses neither support, nor refute the wives' inclusion in the term *Ahl al-Bayt*, which is a much more specific phrase than the word *ahl*.

The latter two verses where the word "*ahl*" and "*bayt*" are used in a genitive construction (*idāfa*) are more relevant to the discussion here and deserve further analysis. The first verse we will analyze is the one that is found in *Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ* (28), verse 29:

﴿وَحَرَمْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَرَاضِعَ مِن قَبْلُ فَقَالَتْ هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ بَيْتٍ
يَكْفُلُونَهُ لَكُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُ نَصْحُونَ﴾

And We prevented from him (all) wet nurses; and [when his sister came to know about this] she said: 'Shall I guide you to a family (*ahl bayt*) who might rear him for you, and look after him with good will?'

⁹⁶ Qurān, *Sūrah al-Nisā'* (4), verse 35.

First of all, one will notice that the phrase in question is indefinite (*nakirah*), not definite (*ma'rifah*), where "*ahl bayt*" is used instead of "*ahl al-bayt*." Therefore, the word "*bayt*" is left in an indefinite form, meaning "a house." In other words, the correct translation of this verse would be "people of a house," rather than "people of the house." This difference in grammatical construction is important and elucidates that this verse is also not relevant for proof about the usage of the phrase "*Ahl al-Bayt*" in the Verse of *Tathīr*, as it is extremely general and unspecified in import.

Secondly, it is unclear how this verse can be used to include one's wife as it is the **mother** of Prophet Mūsā عليه السلام - **not** his wife - who is included in the address.

The second verse used by the contender is Sūrah Hūd (11), verse 73:

﴿قَالُوا أَتَعْجَبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ ۖ رَحِمْتُ اللَّهَ وَبَرَكْنَاهُ ۖ عَلَيْهِمْ أَهْلُ الْبَيْتِ
إِنَّهُ هُوَ حَمِيدٌ مُجِيدٌ﴾

They (the angels) said: 'Are you (Sārah) amazed at the decree of Allah? May the mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you, O people of the house (*ahl al-bayt*)! Indeed, He is All-Praiseworthy, All-Glorious.'

The argument being made is that Sārah عليها السلام, the wife of Prophet Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, is included in the term "*ahl al-bayt*" here based on the inherent context of the verse; therefore why is it that in the Verse of *Tathīr*, we are excluding the wives of the Prophet ﷺ? Furthermore, in this verse there is also a change in the address from the feminine singular pronoun (*nūn al-niswah*) to the masculine plural pronoun (*kum*), which means that the change in pronouns is not at all a problem and should not be seen as such in the Verse of *Tathīr*.

Our response to this claim will be more detailed and exhaustive. First of all, one should note that just because the phrase *ahl al-bayt* is used to include a wife in one verse of the Qurān, does not mean

that they are included in every instance where this phrase is used. In fact, this phrase *ahl al-bayt* has three usages (*itlāqāt*) in the Arabic language as follows:⁹⁷

1. The general linguistic and commonplace understanding (*al-ma'nā al-lughawī al-'urfī al-'āmm*): This implies anyone at all who resides in a particular dwelling or belongs to a certain family - even if it is only metaphorically or secondarily. Therefore, we find in the narrations:

عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: الضيف يلفظ ليلتين فإذا كان الليلة الثالثة فهو من أهل البيت يأكل ما أدرك

On the authority of Abū 'Abdillāh عليه السلام who said: "The Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله said: 'A guest should be pampered for two nights; then when the third night befalls, they are part of the *ahl al-bayt* (people of the household), and can eat whatever they wish.'"⁹⁸

عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام في الهرة أنها من أهل البيت ويتوضأ من سورها

On the authority of Abū 'Abdillāh عليه السلام regarding a cat - that it is among the *ahl al-bayt* (people of the household) from whose drinking bowl one can perform ablution.⁹⁹

It is on this wider meaning of *ahl al-bayt* that many of the Shī'ah jurists (*fuqahā'*) have treated the issue of bequeathing a will in the books of jurisprudence. Based on this understanding (*mafhūm*), it may be possible to include the wives of the Prophet given that they resided in the same dwelling as he did.

2. The general commonplace understanding with specification (*al-ma'nā al-'urfī al-'āmm bi lihāz khāss*): This implies only those who are related to an individual by kinship,

⁹⁷ This is reviewed very beautifully by Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī al-Anṣārī in his book "*Ahl al-Bayt: Imāmatuhum wa Ḥayātuhum*," Pp. 1-40.

⁹⁸ *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, Vol. 24, Pg. 314.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, Pg. 227.

therefore with reference to the Prophet ﷺ, it would include all the Banū Hāshim. It is on this basis that we find Imām 'Alī ؑ stating:

وكان رسول الله ﷺ إذا احمر البأس وأحجم الناس قدم أهل بيته فوقى بهم أصحابه حر السيوف والأسنة. فقتل عبيدة بن الحارث يوم بدر وقتل حمزة يوم أحد، وقتل جعفر يوم مؤتة

And whenever the massacre of war intensified, and people began to retreat, the Prophet of Allah ﷺ used to put his *ahl al-bayt* forward, and thus through them defended his companions from the swords and arrows. Hence, 'Ubaydah ibn al-Ḥarith was killed in Badr, Ḥamzah was killed in Uḥud, and Ja'far was killed in Mu'tah.¹⁰⁰

Based on this understanding, the wives would not be included as part of the *ahl al-bayt* unless they were related to the Prophet ﷺ by kinship. As we discussed previously, this is the meaning that Zayd ibn Arqam adopted as the meaning of *ahl al-bayt* in his narration about the *Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn*.

3. The specialized understanding (*al-ma'nā al-khāss*): This implies the immediate relations and closest individuals to a person, and with reference to the Prophet of Allah ﷺ, it refers to those Five Personalities exclusively, as well as the Imāms who come after them. It is this meaning that the Prophet ﷺ sought to clarify in the various *aḥādīth* about the *Aṣḥāb al-Kisā'* that we previously discussed. As a further example, Imām 'Alī ؑ also implies this meaning when he states:

فوالله ما كان يلقي في روعي، ولا يخطر ببالى أن العرب تزجج هذا الامر من بعده ﷺ عن أهل بيته

¹⁰⁰ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Vol. 3, Pg. 9.

By Allah, it never crossed my mind, nor occurred in my imagination that the Arabs would seize this affair (the *khilāfah*) from his *Ahl al-Bayt* after his demise ﷺ.¹⁰¹

Bearing in mind these three separate understandings of the phrase "*ahl al-bayt*," it becomes imperative to resort to the context to clarify the import of this word in the Qurānic context. When one examines Sūrah Hūd (11), verse 73, the context is clear that the angels had specifically arrived at the house of Ibrāhīm ؑ to give him and his wife the glad tidings of their progeny Ishāq ؑ and Ya'qūb ؑ. Therefore, the use of the definite article as in "*al-bayt*" is a reference to the dwelling wherein Ibrāhīm ؑ and Sārah ؑ were residing. Another possibility of course is that "*al-bayt*" here refers to Abrahamic relationship (*al-nasab*), whereby Sārah ؑ is included given that she was both the mother of a Prophet (Ishāq ؑ), the cousin of Ibrāhīm ؑ, and a believer in his message. Therefore, the use of "*ahl al-bayt*" in this verse is as per the first general usage which we described above.

However, in the Verse of *Taṭhīr*, the matter is entirely different because there are clear contextual clues to **exclude** the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, such as the prior use of "*al-buyūt*" before and after the mention of "*Ahl al-Bayt*," the change in the style of address, the change in pronouns both before and after the address to the wives, and the *aḥādīth* which we previously mentioned, and so on. All of these substantiate that the meaning of "*Ahl al-Bayt*" in the Verse of *Taṭhīr* refers to an exclusive group different to that of the wives; and it becomes clear from the narrations on this topic that the Prophet ﷺ was specifically aiming to establish a new jargon (*muṣṭalaḥ*) in the term "*Ahl al-Bayt*" to subsume **only** the Five Personalities - the third meaning that we explicated above.

¹⁰¹ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Vol. 1, Pg. 307.

Contention #7 - How does the Verse of *Taḥhīr* subsume the other Imāms if it is restricted to the *Ahl al-Kisā*?

The final contention we would like to address is what several Sunnis often attack the Shī'ah for; specifically, they postulate the following: Suppose we accept your interpretation that the Verse of *Taḥhīr* is specific to only the Five Personalities who were under the cloak (*Ahl al-Kisā*). Then how come the Shī'ah go and include the other nine Imāms from the lineage of Imām Ḥusayn ؑ? What about the progeny of Imām Ḥasan ؑ - why are they excluded? What is the criterion used to make this determination of who falls under the purview of the verse, and what is the process which is used based on legitimate Islāmic reasoning?

Response

By restricting the meaning of *Ahl al-Bayt* to the Five *Ahl al-Kisā*, the Prophet ﷺ only sought to exclude those who were present at his time among the relatives and wives; however, if any of the other Imāms of his Purified Progeny ؑ had been present at that time he would no doubt have included them as well.

In fact, the term *Ahl al-Bayt* subsumes those who would come from his lineage, just as it subsumes those who were present at his time. It is analogous to the word nation or community (*ummah*) subsuming those who existed at the Prophet's ﷺ time and the succeeding generations.

However, how do we establish this premise?

Below, we will present proof combining highly reliable Sunni narrations and the methodology of establishing intellectual confidence (*al-wuthūq al-ijmī'nānī*) to establish the identities of

the Twelve Imāms ﷺ, and substantiate all of their inclusion as part of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.¹⁰²

Firstly, it should be said that the best approach in answering this question is through Sunnī sources and narrations, as this avoids circular reasoning (i.e., using a claim made by the claimant himself, as in a Shī'ah Imām saying that he is a Shī'ah Imām). It also makes it clear that one's beliefs are strong enough to be derived from the books of other sects even. One should also focus on using specifically authentic and reliable (*mutawātir*) narrations in order to render one's arguments as robust as possible.

The first step is substantiating that the *Ahl al-Bayt* were **not** limited to only the Five Personalities who existed at the time of the Prophet ﷺ. This is established by the famous Sunnī narration known as *Ḥadīth al-Nujūm*:

عن علي قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ النجوم أمان لأهل السماء، إذا ذهب النجوم ذهب أهل السماء، وأهل بيتي أمان لأهل الأرض، فإذا ذهب أهل بيتي ذهب أهل الأرض

On the authority of 'Alī ﷺ who said: "The Prophet of Allah ﷺ said: 'The stars are a sanctuary for the people of Heaven - when the stars disappear, the people of Heaven will also disappear; and my *Ahl al-Bayt* are a sanctuary for the people of the Earth - so when my *Ahl al-Bayt* disappear, the people of Earth will also disappear.'"¹⁰³

Therefore, per this narration, the Prophetic *Ahl al-Bayt* will remain in this world until the Day of Judgement, as without them the people of Earth cannot persist.

¹⁰² This proof is derived from a combination of Sayyid Kamāl al-Ḥaydarī's series *Man Hum al-Khulafā' al-Ithnā 'Ashar?* (Who are the Twelve Caliphs?); as well as the work of the Zaydī scholar 'Abdullah ibn al-Ḥasan's *Al-Anmūdḥaj al-Khaṭīr* (The Paragon of Grave Significance).

¹⁰³ See Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's, *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥābah*, Vol. 2 Pg. 671.

This is strengthened even further by the famous authentic (*mutawātir*) *Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn*, which we discussed earlier in this book. The Prophetic narration clearly states that: "They (i.e. the Qur'ān and the *Ahl al-Bayt*) will **never** separate until they return to me at the Pond (of *Kawthar*)."¹⁰⁴ From these two narrations, it can be concluded that the term *Ahl al-Bayt* cannot be limited to just the Five Personalities who were under the cloak at the time of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ because they have since left this world, whereas the Day of Judgement has not yet dawned upon us.

The next step is to establish that the members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* are specifically the children of Lady Fāṭima ؑ, and cannot come from any other relatives of the Prophet ﷺ. There are many narrations which can be used to prove this from Sunnī sources, however many of them are disputed by the *Ahl al-Sunnah*.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, we will stick to agreed upon sources, and among these are the following two *ḥadīth*:

عن علي ؑ عن النبي ﷺ يقول: المَهْدِيُّ مِنَّا أَهْلُ الْبَيْتِ، يَصْلَحُهُ اللَّهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ

On the authority of 'Alī ؑ that the Messenger ﷺ said: "The Mahdī is from us, the *Ahl al-Bayt*; Allah will rectify him (i.e. his affair) in a single night."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Examples of these narrations include the following:

أخرج الحاكم وابن عساكر عن جابر رضي الله عنه، عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: إن لكل بني أب عصبة ينتمون إليه إلا ولد فاطمة فأنا وليهم وأنا عصبتهم وهم عترتي خلقوا من طينتي

Al-Ḥākim and Ibn 'Asākir have narrated on the authority of Jābir from the Messenger ﷺ: "For all children of a father, there is an ancestry by which they are traced except the sons of Fāṭima - for I am their guardian and line of ancestry; they are my Household (*'Itratī*), and have been created from my soil."

¹⁰⁵ *Sunan ibn Mājah*, Book 36, Ḥadīth 160.

عن أم سلمة قالت : سمعت رسول الله ﷺ يقول: المهدي من عترتي من ولد فاطمة

On the authority of Umm Salamah who said: "I heard the Prophet of Allah ﷺ say: 'The Mahdī is from my progeny - from the children of Fāṭima.'"¹⁰⁶

Putting these two narrations together, we can derive by the transitive property that the children of Fāṭima ؑ are the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

Nonetheless, the question remains regarding how one may exclude the other relatives of the Prophet ﷺ?

To substantiate this portion, we return to the import of the Verse of Purification, which as we discussed earlier affirms the purity and impeccability of the *Ahl al-Kisā'*. We can also garner the same conclusion from analyzing the *Ḥadīth of Thaḳalayn*, whereby the Prophet ﷺ stated that we must hold onto his *Ahl al-Bayt*, and that they will never separate from the Qurān until the end of time. Again, if this does not affirm infallibility, it at least affirms that the *Ahl al-Bayt* of the Prophet ﷺ are the highest paragons of piety and practical application of Prophetic guidance.

We have the molds (*maṣādiq*) of those who belong to the *Ahl al-Bayt* embodied in the *Ahl al-Kisā'* and the Mahdī, as per the authentic narrations (*ṣaḥīh riwāyāt*) of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*.

The next point of analysis is to specifically derive that the *Ahl al-Bayt* are fourteen in number (Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, Lady Fāṭima ؑ, and twelve other individuals ؑ). Thus far, the analysis we have carried out substantiated six of these personalities (Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, Lady Fāṭima ؑ, Imām 'Alī ؑ, Imām Ḥasan ؑ, Imām Ḥusayn ؑ, and the Mahdī ؑ).

The next set of reliable narrations (*mutawātir riwāyāt*) in the books of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* that we will analyze are those which

¹⁰⁶ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Vol. 2, Pg. 310.

affirm the presence of twelve successors (*khulafā'*) after the final Prophet of Allah ﷺ. There are two *ḥadīth* that we will present here:

عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ سَمْرَةَ قَالَ دَخَلْتُ مَعَ أَبِي عَلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ، فَسَمِعْتُهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ لَا يَنْقُضِي حَتَّى يَمُتِي فِيهِمْ اثْنَا عَشَرَ خَلِيفَةً . قَالَ : ثُمَّ تَكَلَّمَ بِكَلَامٍ خَفِيَ عَلَيَّ . قَالَ : فَقُلْتُ لِأَبِي : مَا قَالَ ؟ قَالَ : كُلُّهُمْ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ :

Jābir ibn Samrah narrates saying: "I entered with my father upon the Messenger ﷺ and heard him saying: 'This affair will not cease until twelve caliphs have passed over you,' then he spoke in a suppressed voice such that I could not hear him. I (later) asked my father what he said and he answered: 'All of them will be from Quraysh.'"¹⁰⁷

عن عرابض بن سارية أن النبي قال: فإنه من يعش منكم فسيرى اختلافاً كثيراً، فعليكم بسنتي وسنة الخلفاء الراشدين المهديين، عضوا عليها بالنواجذ، وإياكم ومحدثات الأمور؛ فإن كل بدعة ضلالة

Irbād (ibn Sāriyah) states that the Messenger said: "Whoever lives after you all will see a great deal of divergence, therefore hold onto my traditions (*sunnah*) and the *sunnah* of the righteous and guided caliphs (*khulafāh*), and hold onto them by your molars?. Then beware of newly founded (religious) affairs, for every innovation is deviation."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ This *ḥadīth* has been narrated by Bukhārī, as well as Muslim, and is considered to be an authentic tradition (*mutawātir ḥadīth*) narrated by over thirty companions of the Prophet. When one examines the text of the *ḥadīth* in *Musnad Ahmad*, it becomes clear that the reason the Prophet's ﷺ voice became suppressed was because his audience began to raise a commotion! We should wonder and question why the companions of the Prophet ﷺ would try to block out this important statement of the final Messenger?

¹⁰⁸ This has been narrated by Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn Mājah, and is also considered to be an authentic tradition (*mutawātir ḥadīth*) narrated by nine companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

Therefore, from the wordings of these two *ḥadīth*, we derive a few key characteristics:

1. There will be twelve successors after Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.
2. All of them will be from Quraysh.¹⁰⁹
3. They give Islām honour, are righteous, and are well-guided.
4. They have a *sunnah* which the Prophet ﷺ commands us to uphold.
5. These successors will not cease to hold reign as long as the religion is upright.

It is interesting that our brothers from the *Ahl al-Sunnah* have tried very hard to find a proper explanation (*miṣdāq*) for this *ḥadīth* of the twelve caliphs, but have failed to produce it, except for fanciful and ludicrous proposals.¹¹⁰

The conscientious reader should note at this point that the commandment of the Prophet to adhere to these twelve successors (*khulafā'*) sounds very similar to his commandments to adhere to the *Ahl al-Bayt* in the *Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn* from several angles.

Firstly, both are noted to be the sources of guidance after the demise of the final Prophet ﷺ through which one will be protected from deviation; they will persist as long as the religion is upright;

¹⁰⁹ There are other versions of this tradition which state even further that these twelve successors are all from Banī Hāshim, and some of them even spell out their names as the twelve Imāms, although these are quoted in sources disputed by the *Ahl al-Sunnah* such as *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah* by al-Qandūzī al-Ḥanafī.

¹¹⁰ A very good, exhaustive analysis and critique of the various attempts of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* to explain this authentic narration can be found in a three-part Arabic article entitled: *Aḥādīth al-Ithnay 'Ashar: Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah Shāmilah* (The Narrations of the Twelve: An Exhaustive and Comprehensive Study), by Shaykh Ṣafā' al-Dīn al-Khazrajī. The link to the first part of this article is: www.tinyurl.com/4vfsyw5e

the Prophet ﷺ has commanded us to hold onto them; and both groups are from the tribe of Quraysh.

Furthermore, there is yet another version of *Ḥadith al-Thaqalayn* whereby the Prophet specifically used the word *khalifatayn* - two *khalifahs* (successors) instead of *thaqalayn* (the two weighty things):

عن زيد بن ثابت، قال: قال: رسول الله ﷺ: إني تارك فيكم خليفتين كتاب الله
 حبل ممدود ما بين السماء والأرض وعترتي أهل بيتي، وأنهما لن يتفرقا حتى
 يردا علي الحوض

On the authority of Zayd ibn Thābit who said: "The Prophet of Allah ﷺ said: 'I am leaving behind two *khalifahs* (*khalifatayn*): the Book of Allah - an Extended Rope between the Heavens and the Earth; and my Progeny, my *Ahl al-Bayt*; and they will not separate until they return to me at the Pond (of *Kawthar*).'"¹¹¹

The other corroborator (*qarīnah*) in these narrations is the categorical commandment from the Prophet to hold onto the *Ahl al-Bayt*/the twelve successors (*khulafā'*); and this implies that these individuals whom the Prophet is alluding to will never deviate from the truth, and will always enjoin people towards guidance which is consistent with the Prophet's teachings. This serves as an indication towards their infallibility, as it is inconceivable that the Prophet would command us to observe the dictates of a group of people who violate the rulings of Islām.

Through combining these narrations, we can propose that the first three Successors of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ were Imām 'Alī ؑ, Imām Ḥasan ؑ, and Imām Ḥusayn ؑ. We also receive

¹¹¹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Vol. 5, Pg. 182.

corroboration from the Sunnī sources that the Mahdī ﷺ is the last of these Twelve Successors.¹¹²

At this point, the Sunnī books do not give us any further corroboration; but we now have standard models (*al-maṣādīq*) of how these Successors should be: they are the foremost Muslim paragons in knowledge, action, and piety. So how can we establish the inclusion of the fourth to eleventh Shī'ah Imāms within this paradigm?

At this point, we will refer to the books of history and biography (*tarājim*) of the Ahl al-Sunnah regarding the fourth to eleventh Shī'ah Imāms. The reason for why this is a strong corroborator (*qarīnah*) is because they would have no reason to forge lies about the status of our Imāms, in fact they would likely underestimate who they really were because their allegiances were to the Umayyads and Abbāsids instead, and many of these biographers despised the Shī'ahs.

When we go through the writings of Ahl al-Sunnah biographers such as: al-Dhahabī, Ibn Khallikān, al-Nawawī, al-Safadī, Ibn Ḥajar, and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ḥanbalī, we garner that each of our Imāms were considered by the admissions of these biographers as impeccable paragons of piety (*taqwā*), knowledge (*ilm*), and leadership. Even further, there are historical proofs narrated in the books of the Ahl al-Sunnah that our Imāms would win against anyone in debate, were not taught by any worldly

¹¹² This can be gathered from the following Prophetic *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Ḥākim in his *Al-Mustadrak*:

فإذا رأيتموه فبايعوه ولو حبواً على الثلج، فإنه خليفة الله المهدي

When you see him then give him your allegiance even if you have to crawl on ice, for he is the *khalīfah* of Allah, the Mahdī.

teachers, and were often pursued by the kings (*sulṭāns*) of their time for their knowledge and advice.¹¹³

The below quotations are simply a drop in the ocean of the merits of the Twelve Imāms. However, simply by way of demonstration, we will proceed by presenting evidence of the status of the Imāms in the books of the Ahl al-Sunnah as follows:

1. Regarding Imām ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (عليه السلام), Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī¹¹⁴ states:

علي بن الحسين بن علي بن أبي طالب الهاشمي، زين العابدين، ثقة، ثبت، عابد، فقيه، فاضل، مشهور، قال ابن عيينة عن الزهري: ما رأيت قرشياً أفضل منه

‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Hāshimī, Zayn al-‘Ābidīn was trustworthy, reliable, a well-reputed ascetic, a jurist, and a paragon. Ibn ‘Uyaynah states from al-Zuhārī that: “I have not seen a person from the Quraysh better than him.”¹¹⁵

2. Regarding Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (عليه السلام), Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī¹¹⁶ states:

وكان أحد من جمع بين العلم والعمل والسؤدد والشرف والثقة والرزانة، وكان أهلاً للخلافة... وشهر أبو جعفر بالباقر، من: بَقَرَ العلم أي شَقَّه، فَعَرَفَ أصله

¹¹³ For those who are interested, you can review the book of Shaykh Ḥikmat al-Raḥmah entitled *A‘immah Ahl al-Bayt fī Kutub Ahl al-Sunnah*.

¹¹⁴ Shihāb al-Dīn ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (773-852 AH) was a Sunnī Shāfi‘ī scholar who is well-recognized as one of the experts in *ḥadīth* sciences. He is most renowned for his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* known as *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*.

¹¹⁵ *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*, Vol. 1, Pg. 411.

¹¹⁶ Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī al-Dimashqī (673-748 AH) was a Sunnī Shāfi‘ī historian and *ḥadīth* expert known for his famous *rijālī* [biographies of the narrators of the *aḥādīth*] encyclopedia *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā*.

وخفيّه، ولقد كان أبو جعفر إمامًا مجتهدًا تاليًا لكتاب الله، كبير الشأن إلى أن قال: وقد عدّه النسائي وغيره في فقهاء التابعين بالمدينة، واتفق الحفاظ على الاحتجاج بأبي جعفر

He was among those who fused virtuous knowledge and action, lordship and honour, trustworthiness and reverence, and he was worthy of the caliphate...and Abū Ja'far (which was the title of the 5th Imām) was known as *al-Bāqir* because he cleaved knowledge in a way that he apprehended its core and its secret. Abū Ja'far was an Imām, extremely learned (*mujtahid*), a reciter of the Book of Allah, and grand in rank.... Al-Nisā'i and others considered him among the jurists of the *Tābi'in*¹¹⁷ in Madīnah; and the memorizers of traditions (*aḥādith*) were unanimous in using the words of Abū Ja'far as proof.¹¹⁸

3. Regarding Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (عليه السلام), Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥah al-Shāfi'ī¹¹⁹ writes:

هو من عظماء أهل البيت وساداتهم عليهم السلام ذو علوم جمّة، وعبادة موفرة، وأوراد متواصلة، وزهادة بيّنة، وتلاوة كثيرة، يتتبع معاني القرآن، ويستخرج من بحر جواهره، ويستنتج عجائبه، ويقسم أوقاته على أنواع الطاعات، بحيث يحاسب عليها نفسه، رؤيته تُذكر الآخرة، واستماع كلامه يُزهد في الدنيا، والافتداء بهديّه يورث الجنة، نور قسماته شاهد أنّه من سلالة النبوة، وطهارة أفعاله تصدع أنّه من ذرية الرسالة

¹¹⁷ Literally, 'successors,' it refers to the rightly-guided generation immediately after the first generation of Muslims (i.e., the companions of Prophet Muḥammad a).

¹¹⁸ *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, Vol. 4, Pp. 402-403.

¹¹⁹ Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥah al-Shāfi'ī (582-652 AH) was a famous Sunnī jurist known for his asceticism. He wrote a famous book regarding the virtues of the family of the Prophet called *Maṭālib al-Sa'ul fī Manāqib Āle al-Rasūl*.

He was among the greats of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their erudite ones (peace be upon them), imbued with immense knowledge, engaged in abundant worship, performing constant liturgy, manifest in his asceticism, and was excessive in the recitation of Allah's Book. He would trace the meanings of the Qur'ān, extract jewels from its deep ocean, and consolidate its marvels. He would spread his time over a plethora of acts of obedience, taking himself to account in their pursuit. Looking at him would remind one of the Hereafter, and listening to his speech would make a person abstain from this world, emulation of his example would assure one entry into Heaven. The light of his countenance was proof that he was from the loins of Messengership, and his immaculate actions testify that he was from the progeny of Prophethood.¹²⁰

4. Regarding Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim (عليه السلام), consider what Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī¹²¹ said:

كان يُدعى العبد الصالح؛ لأجل عبادته واجتهاده وقيامه بالليل، وكان كريماً
حليماً، إذا بلغه عن رجل يؤذيه بعث إليه مال

He was known as a righteous worshipper due to his piety, asceticism, and night-vigils. He was noble and forbearing; whenever he heard about someone vilifying him, he would dispatch money to them.¹²²

5. Regarding Imām 'Alī al-Riḍā (عليه السلام), let us have a glance at what al-Dhahabī mentions:

¹²⁰ *Maṭālib al-Sa'āl fī Manāqib Āle al-Rasūl*, Vol. 2, Pg. 111.

¹²¹ 'Abd al-Rahmān Abū al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī (510-597 AH) was a Ḥanbalī polymath and polemicist who lived in Baghdad. He is most known for his *Talbīs al-Iblīs*, a book describing various sects that Ibn al-Jawzī deemed heretical. His book *Ṣifāh al-Ṣafwāh* provides biographies of many of the famous saints of Islām.

¹²² *Ṣifāh al-Ṣafwāh*, Vol. 2, Pg. 184.

علي الرضا، الإمام السيّد، أبو الحسن، علي الرضا بن موسى الكاظم، بن جعفر الصادق، بن محمد الباقر، بن علي بن الحسين، الهاشمي العلوي المدني ... كان من العلم والدين والسؤدد بمكان ... وقد كان علي الرضا كبير الشأن، أهلاً للخلافة

The exemplary paragon, Abū'l Ḥasan, 'Alī al-Riḍā ibn Musā al-Kāẓim ibn Ja'far al-Ṣādiq ibn Muḥammad al-Bāqir ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn - the Hashimite [from the clan of Banū Hāshim], the Alawite [from the progeny of Imām 'Alī ﷺ], the Medinite [from the city of Medina] ... he was altogether unrivaled in his knowledge, religiosity, and sagacity (not in Arabic) ... and certainly 'Alī al-Riḍā was grand in stature, suitable for the caliphate.¹²³

6. Regarding Imām Muḥammad al-Jawād ﷺ, we only need to reference the words of Ibn Taymiyyah:¹²⁴

محمد بن علي الجواد كان من أعيان بني هاشم وهو معروف بالسخاء والسؤدد؛ ولهذا سمي الجواد

Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Jawād was among the paragons of Banū Hāshim. He was well-known for his generosity and nobleness, and as such he was nicknamed *al-Jawād* (the extremely generous one).¹²⁵

7. Regarding Imām 'Alī al-Hādī ﷺ, we quote Ibn Ṭalḥah al-Shāfi'ī who states the following:

¹²³ *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, Vol. 9, Pp. 387-388.

¹²⁴ Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah (661-728 AH) was a Hanbalite jurist and proto-Salafī scholar known for his iconoclastic views against belief in saints and visitation of shrines. He was accused by many of his contemporaries of theological anthropomorphism. He is most famous for his work *Minhāj al-Sunnah*, written as a refutation to 'Allāmah Ḥillī's work *Minhāj al-Karāmah*.

¹²⁵ *Minhāj al-Sunnah*, Vol. 4, Pg. 68.

وأما مناقبه: فمنها ما حلّ في الآذان محلّ حلاها بأشنانها، واكتنفته شَعَفًا به
اكتناف اللثائي الثمينة بأصدافها، وشهد لأبي الحسن أنّ نفسه موصوفة بنفائس
أوصافها، وأنه نازلة من الدوحة النبويّة في ذرى أشرافها، وشرفات أعرافها

As for his merits: amidst them are those which adorn the ears like earrings, and are prized like pearls in their oyster shells. Regarding Abū Ḥasan, it has been well-attested that his soul boasted the most glorious attributes, descended from the heights of the tree of Prophethood, and the elevated stations of its crest.¹²⁶

8. As for Imām al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī ؑ, consider the words of Ibn Ṣabbāgh al-Mālikī:¹²⁷

مناقب سيّدنا أبي محمّد الحسن العسكري دالّة على أنّه السري ابن السري، فلا
يَشْكُ في إمامته أحد، ولا يمتري، واعلم أنّه يبعث مكرمة فسواه بإيعها وهو
المشتري، واحد زمانه من غير مدافع، ويسبح وحده من غير منازع، وسيّد أهل
عصره، إمام أهل دهره، أقواله سديدة، وأفعاله حميدة، وإذا كانت أفاضل زمانه
قصيدة فهو في بيت القصيدة، وإنّ انتظموا عقداً كان مكان الواسطة الفريدة،
فارس العلوم الذي لا يُجارى، ومبين غوامضها فلا يحاول ولا يُمارى، كاشف
الحقائق بنظره الصائب، مظهر الدقائق بفكره الثاقب، المحدث في سرّه بالأمور
الخفّيات، الكريم الأصل والنفس والذات، تغمّده الله برحمته وأسكنه فسيح
جنّاته بمحمّد (ص) آمين

The excellences of our master, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī are proof of his being a chief son of a chief - thus no one doubts or casts aspersions on his exemplary stature. Know that if a merit should be surmised, all others in the market have forfeited it to him already. The indisputable

¹²⁶ *Maṭālib al-Sa’ūl fī Manāqib Āle al-Rasūl*, Vol. 2, Pp. 144-145.

¹²⁷ Nūr al-Dīn ibn al-Ṣabbāgh al-Mālikī (784-855 AH) was a Sunnī jurist, ḥāfiẓ, and ḥadīth scholar. He is known for a book where he discusses the merits of the Twelve Imāms, entitled *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah fī Ma’rifat al-A’immah*.

unrivalled one of his era - he swims alone without any rival. He is the master of the people of his age, and the leader of his generation. His statements are glorious, his actions are meritorious, and if the virtuous ones of his contemporaries are like a eulogy (*qaṣīdah*), then he is their climax. If they should amalgamate to form a necklace, then he would be their centerpiece. He is the unparalleled knight of knowledge - clarifying its ambiguities such that there is no room for dispute. He expounds truths with his precise perception; he clarifies their nuances with his deep discernment; he intuits himself of secret matters. He is noble in his lineage, soul, and psyche; may Allah envelop him in His Mercy and cause him to dwell in his Spacious Gardens in the proximity of Muḥammad ﷺ. Amīn!¹²⁸

In reference to the twelfth successor of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, Imām Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Mahdī ʿaṣṣatillāhi, although his life is shrouded in mystery and occultation, there are nonetheless abundant Sunnī scholars of history who have attested to his birth. Consider for instance the words of al-Dhahabī where he states:

وَأَمَّا ابْنُهُ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْحَسَنِ الَّذِي يَدْعُوهُ الرَّاغِبَةُ: الْقَائِمُ، الْخَلْفُ، الْحُجَّةُ، فَوُلِدَ
سَنَةَ: ثَمَانٍ وَخَمْسِينَ، وَقِيلَ سَنَةَ: سِتٍّ وَخَمْسِينَ، عَاشَ بَعْدَ أَبِيهِ سَنَتَيْنِ ثُمَّ عُدِمَ،
وَلَمْ يُعْلَمَ كَيْفَ مَاتَ

And as for his son, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan who the *Rāfiḍah*¹²⁹ call 'The Riser' (*al-Qā'im*), 'The Righteous Remainder' (*al-Khalaf*), and 'The Proof' (*al-Hujjah*) was born in 258 AH, and it is also surmised 256 AH. He survived his

¹²⁸ *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah fī Ma'rifat al-A'imma*, Pg. 279.

¹²⁹ Lit. the 'refusers,' is a term historically utilized by some Sunni polemicists to refer to the Shī'ah. This is a reference to the fact that the Shī'ah reject the legitimacy of the caliphate of the first three Caliphs and believe in Imām 'Alī's ʿaṣṣatillāhi uninterrupted vicegerency after the Noble Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

father for two years then he disappeared, and it is not known how he died.¹³⁰

In reference to his repute, the Sunnī books of *rijāl*¹³¹ do not specifically document his biography given that most of his life was spent in occultation. However, Shaykh Hikmat al-Raḥmah has documented nearly forty Sunnī scholars who recognize Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan as the Mahdī. For the sake of brevity however, we will suffice to quote the chain of a *ḥadīth* quoted by Ibn al-Jazarī¹³² as below, where he mentions Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan as “the Imām of his time:”

أخبرنا شيخنا الإمام جمال الدين محمد بن محمد الجمالي زاهد عصره، قال: أخبرنا الإمام سعيد الدين محمد بن مسعود محدث فارس في زمانه، أخبرنا الشيخ ظهير الدين إسماعيل بن المظفر بن محمد الشيرازي عالم وقته، أخبرنا أبو طاهر عبد السلام بن أبي الربيع الحنفي محدث زمانه، أخبرنا أبو بكر عبد الله بن محمد بن شاهور القلانسي شيخ عصره، أخبرنا أبو المبارك عبد العزيز بن محمد بن منصور الآدمي إمام أوانه، أخبرنا سليمان بن إبراهيم بن محمد بن سليمان نادرة دهره، حدثنا أبو صالح أحمد بن عبد الملك بن علي النيسابوري غريب وقته، حدثنا أبو طاهر محمد بن محمد بن محمض الزيايدي فريد دهره، حدثنا أبو حامد أحمد بن محمد بن هاشم البلاذري حافظ زمانه، ثنا محمد بن الحسن بن علي إمام عصره، حدثنا أبي الحسن بن علي السيد المحجوب حدثنا أبي علي بن محمد الهادي، حدثنا أبي محمد بن علي الجواد حدثنا أبي علي بن موسى الرضا، حدثنا أبي موسى بن جعفر الكاظم، حدثنا أبي جعفر بن محمد الصادق، حدثنا أبي محمد بن علي الباقر، حدثنا أبي علي بن

¹³⁰ *Tārīkh al-Islām*, Vol. 19, Pg. 113.

¹³¹ The books which detail the biographies of the narrators of the *ḥadīth*.

¹³² Abū al-Khayr Shams al-Dīn ibn al-Jazarī (751-833 AH) was a Shāfiʿī scholar considered one of the leading scholars in the field of Qurānic studies. He is famous particularly for two large poems he composed regarding *tajwīd* (the science of recitation of the Qurān) and the ten Qurānic *qirāʾāt* (the science of the variant readings of the Noble Qurān).

الحسين زين العابدين، حَدَّثَنَا أَبِي الحسين بن علي سَيِّد الشهداء، حَدَّثَنَا أَبِي علي بن أبي طالب سَيِّد الأولياء رضي الله عنهم، أَخْبَرَنِي سَيِّد الأنبياء مُحَمَّد بن عبد الله صَلَّى الله عليه وسلَّم، قَالَ: أَخْبَرَنِي جِبْرَائِيل سَيِّد الملائكة، قَالَ: قَالَ الله تعالى سَيِّد السادات: إِي أَنَا الله لَا إِلَه إِلَّا أَنَا مَنْ أَقَرَّ لِي بالتوحيد دخل حُصْنِي، وَمَنْ دخل حُصْنِي أَمِنَ من عَذَابِي

Our Shaykh, Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Jamālī, the ascetic of his time, narrated to us from Al-Imām Saʿīd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Masʿūd, the narrator (*muḥaddith*) of Iran in his time, who narrated to us from Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Balādhurī, the memorizer (*ḥāfiẓ*) of his time,¹³³ from Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, **the Imām of his time**, from his father al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-Sayyid al-Maḥjūb, from his father ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Hādī, from his father Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jawād, from his father ʿAlī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā, from his father Mūsā ibn Jaʿfar al-Kāẓim, from his father Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, from his father Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Bāqir, from his father ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, from his father al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī Sayyid al-Shuhadā, from his father ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib Sayyid al-Awṣiyā (may Allah be pleased with them all) , from the Master of the Prophets, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdillāh ﷺ, that Jibrāʾīl, the Master of the Angels said: “Allah, the Almighty, the Lord of Lords has said: ‘Indeed I am Allah, there is no god except Me; whoever submits to Monotheism

¹³³ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī al-Balādhurī (d 339 AH), also known as al-Balādhurī al-Ṣaghīr, was considered one of the eminent *ḥadīth* scholars of his time, and received high acclaims from Sunnī *rijāl* scholars including al-Samʿānī, al-Dhahabī, and Abū ʿAbdillāh al-Ḥākim. He was murdered in Ṭabarān, one of the provinces in Ṭūs, Iran.

(*Tawhīd*) enters into My Fortress; and whoever enters into My Fortress will be safe from My Wrath.”^{134 & 135}

This is in addition to the fact that the Shī‘ah sources are quite abundant in documenting the providential guidance of the Twelfth Imām عليه السلام to his Shī‘ah through his four emissaries (*al-sufarā al-arba‘ah*).

Of course, this still does not substantiate that the fourth to the twelfth Shī‘ah Imāms are the ones meant by the Prophet ﷺ when he mentioned that there will twelve successors; they could just be paragons of righteousness. However, at this point, we present a rational proof - these Imāms have a set of peculiar characteristics that we have already established:

¹³⁴ *Asnā al-Maṭālib fī Manāqib Sayyidina ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, Pp. 86-87.

¹³⁵ This *ḥadīth* is also narrated famously on the authority of Imām ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā, where it is nicknamed “*The Ḥadīth of the Golden Chain*.” Some researchers have opined that a scribal error occurred in al-Balādhurī’s narrating this *ḥadīth* from the twelfth Imām عليه السلام, and they believe that he instead narrated it from Imām Ḥasan al-‘Askarī عليه السلام. However, the reader should bear in mind that Imām al-‘Askarī passed away in 260 AH which is nearly 80 years prior to al-Balādhurī’s demise. It seems much more likely that al-Balādhurī narrated this *ḥadīth* from the twelfth Imām during the minor occultation, as during this period there is evidence that the twelfth Imām did meet with a limited number of people. In any case, this narration on the authority of the twelfth Imām is narrated by a number of Sunnī giants in their *ḥadīth* collections, in addition to Ibn al-Jazarī, including Muḥammad ibn Mas‘ūd al-Kāzrūnī (*Musalsalāt al-Kāzrūnī*, Pg. 65); Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Makkī (*Al-Fawā'id al-Jalīlah fī Musalsalāt ibn ‘Aqīlah*, Pg. 91); and Walīollāh al-Dahlawī (*Al-Faṣl al-Mubīn fī al-Musalsal min Ḥadīth al-Nabī al-Amīn*, Pp. 96-97). Therefore, if there was a scribal error in the *ḥadīth*, it is strange that none of these four great Sunnī narrators (*muḥaddithīn*) noticed it - rather, they unanimously authenticated the narration. For more details, please see this article: www.m-mahdi.net/almauood/articles-221

- a. A string of eleven personalities in continuous uninterrupted generations.
- b. Eleven of them are from the sons of 'Alī عليه السلام and Fāṭima عليها السلام, and nine of them are from the sons of Ḥusayn عليه السلام.
- c. They are accepted by both the Ahl al-Sunnah and the Shī'ah as paragons of knowledge, piety, and leadership. If you go to Zayd ibn 'Alī, you stop at five. If you go to Ismā'il ibn Ja'far, you stop at seven because their subsequent generations were not unanimously recognized as exemplars.
- d. Their reign continued for 250 years in succession, and the Shī'ah belief is that the twelfth one in this chain was born, is still alive, and is currently in occultation.

Now the question which arises here is has such a situation ever existed in Islāmic history, let alone world history? Even among the Prophets, no such thing ever happened where you had a paragon son of a paragon son of a paragon for uninterrupted successive generations ten times in a row. We quote the words of Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ¹³⁶ where he states:

مَنْ الَّذِي يُعَدُّ مِنْ قَرِيشٍ مَا يَعُدُّهُ الطَّالِبُونَ عَشْرَةَ فِي نَسْقٍ: كُلُّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمْ:
عالم، زاهد، ناسك، شجاع، جواد، طاهر، زاك، فمنهم خلفاء، ومنهم مُرْشِحُونَ:
ابن ابن... هكذا إلى عشرة، وهم الحسن [العسكري] بن علي بن محمد بن
علي بن موسى بن جعفر بن محمد بن علي بن الحسين بن علي عليه السلام وهذا لم
يَتَّفَقْ لِبَيْتٍ مِنْ بِيُوتِ الْعَرَبِ وَلَا مِنْ بِيُوتِ الْعَجَمِ

¹³⁶ Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ al-Baṣrī (159-255 AH) was a famous Abbasid-Era Mu'tazilite man of letters who was contemporaneous to the Imāms of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. He wrote on many topics including zoology, philosophy, theology, polemics, and rhetoric. He is most famous for his encyclopedic *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, describing over 300 species of animals in 7 volumes, and his *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* describing moral anecdotes of various misers.

Who is it that can find numbered in Quraysh what the progeny of Abū Ṭālib have scored: ten individuals in succession - all of whom are scholars, ascetics, pious, brave, generous, pure, and impeccable? Among them are caliphs and worthy candidates - son after son after son until ten in succession. They are al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Mūsā ibn Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ﷺ. Such an event has not occurred in any household of the Arabs, nor the non-Arabs.^{137 & 138}

There are two possibilities here: either this is Divine Providence, or just a coincidence. What is the probability of each of these possibilities? That this is just a happenstance is extremely far-fetched and low likelihood, because thousands of coincidences need to occur for eleven successive generations to all achieve such an elevated and pristine status within the Islāmic nation. Therefore, the probability that this occurred through the Divine decree of Allah is rendered highly likely.¹³⁹ Hence, there is no better instantiation (*miṣḍāq*) for this authentic (*mutawātir*) narration of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ than the Twelve Shī‘ah Imāms.

From the above analysis, we conclude that the Verse of *Taḥhīr* was not just limited to the *Ahl al-Kisā’*, the Five Personalities who were under the cloak during the time of the Prophet, but rather

¹³⁷ *Al-Rasā’il al-Siyāsiyyah*, Radd Hāshim ‘alā Mufākharat Umayyah bi al-Nisā’, Pg. 153.

¹³⁸ The astute reader will notice here that al-Jāhīz did not mention the twelfth Imām; this should not surprise us because the demise of al-Jāhīz occurred during the Imamate of Imām Ḥasan al-‘Askarī ?.

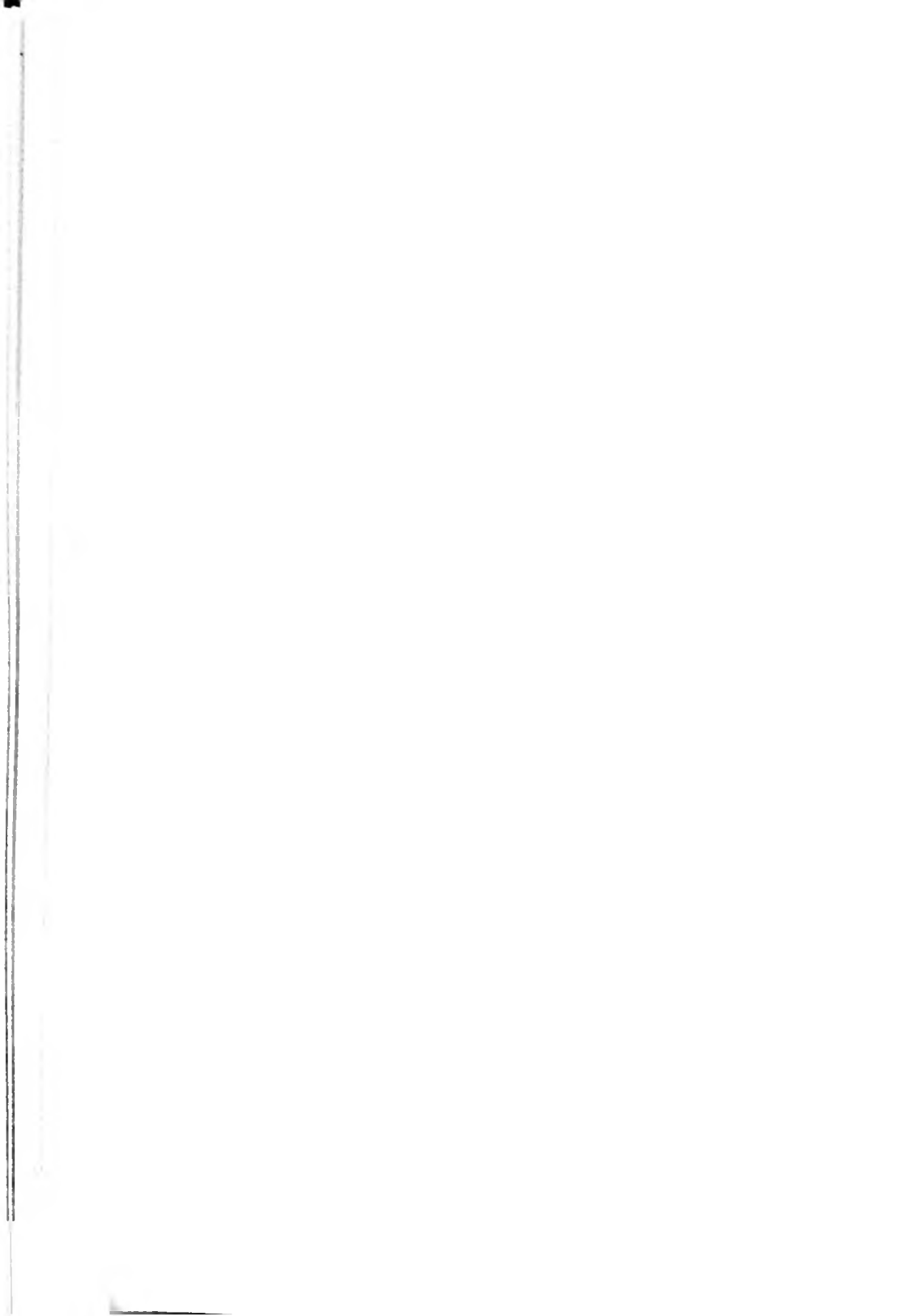
¹³⁹ The mode of argumentation being employed here is inductive, based on probability theory; this is a form of argumentation brilliantly expounded by Shahīd Bāqir al-Ṣadr in his *Al-Usus al-Manṭiqiyyah li al-Istiqrā* which has been translated into English as *The Logical Foundations of Induction*.

must subsume latter individuals because of the *aḥādīth* which indicate that the *Ahl al-Bayt* will persist until the Day of Judgement. We know that this *Ahl al-Bayt* described by the final Messenger ﷺ must be a specialized group, not a general one because they are specifically identified as a source of guidance in the narrations. Furthermore, their last representative, the Mahdī, is the paragon by whom we ascertain that the *Ahl al-Bayt* are specifically from the progeny of Lady Fāṭima ʿ.

Separately, we gather from the numerous similarities between the *Ḥadīth* of *Thaqalayn* and the *Ḥadīth* of the Twelve Caliphs that the successors after Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ are twelve in number. By analyzing the various prerequisites of these individuals and comparing them to the instantiation (*miṣdāq*) of the Twelve Shīʿah Imāms, we conclude that there is no better paradigm for this group of individuals described by the Prophet ﷺ than these Twelve individuals:

1. Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib ʿ
2. Imām Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-Mujtabā ʿ
3. Imām Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Shahīd ʿ
4. Imām ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn ʿ
5. Imām Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Bāqir ʿ
6. Imām Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq ʿ
7. Imām Mūsā ibn Jaʿfar al-Kāzim ʿ
8. Imām ʿAlī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā ʿ
9. Imām Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jawād ʿ
10. Imām ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Hādī ʿ
11. Imām Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAskarī ʿ
12. Imām Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ḥujjah al-Mahdī ʿ

As such, we extend the import of this Verse of *Taṭhīr* to include them all as well.



Epilogue

During this investigation, we have tried our level best to extract the key analytical points regarding the Verse of Purification into a cogent work for an English-speaking audience. In so doing, we have examined the verse from lexical, syntactical, Qurānic-contextual, and tradition-based (*aḥadīth*) standpoints; we have also addressed several of the common contentions levelled by polemicists about the interpretation we adopted.

Although at times quite technical, we hope that the analysis provided rendered it clear to the reader that the *Ahl al-Bayt* ﷺ are limited to the Five Under the Cloak (*Aṣḥāb al-Kisā'* and the purified Imāms from their lineage) to the exclusion of all other possible candidates. Considering the myriad arguments we presented, we contend that this thesis is not only tenable, but also the most harmonious with the Qurānic context and the *aḥadīth* literature.

Nonetheless, we are certain that there will still be individuals who insist that the wives of the Prophet ﷺ or the Prophet's other tribesmen are subsumed within the fold of the proclamation of this special purification (*taṭhīr*), and in doing so we believe that they are either deliberately or inadvertently casting a blind eye to a preponderance of evidence to the contrary.

While the wives of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and the Banū Hāshim certainly warrant a level of respect, the immaculate purification mentioned in this verse excludes them. Rather, such a Divine ordinance of purity only finds its substantiation in the Selected Five Personalities, and - by extension - the other nine Imāms appointed directly by Allāh ﷻ.

The apparent context amidst the other verses surrounding the Verse of Purification addressing the wives of the Prophet ﷺ serves to do nothing but accentuate this stark contrast - a contrast between believers who have been favoured with Prophetic matrimony, and those who are truly the "Family of the Prophet."

We do not dare to claim that this publication is exhaustive in its analysis. We will have succeeded however, if the reader takes away an appreciation for the intensity with which the scholars have engaged and written about this verse. In the end, while the depth of Allah's ﷻ words surpass the faculties of human comprehension, we believe they are nonetheless clear enough for those who approach His Book with a keen, open, and objective mind and a discerning spirit.

Our collective prayer is that Allah ﷻ grants us all the success and Divine Providence (*tawfīq*) to accept and follow His Signs when they are presented to us. Allāh ﷻ says in the Qurān:

﴿وَقُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ سَيَرِيكُمْ ءَايَاتِهِ فَتَعْرِفُونَهَا وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

And say: 'All praise is due to Allah! In time, He will make you see [the truth of] His signs, and then you shall know them [for what they are]. And Your Lord is not unmindful of whatever you all may do.' (Sūrah al-Naml (27), verse 93)

﴿رَبَّنَا ءَامَنَّا بِمَا أَنزَلْتَ وَاتَّبَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ فَاكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ﴾

O Our Lord, we believe in what You have revealed, and we follow the Messenger; therefore, record us with those who bear witness [to the truth]! (Sūrah Āle 'Imrān (3), verse 53)

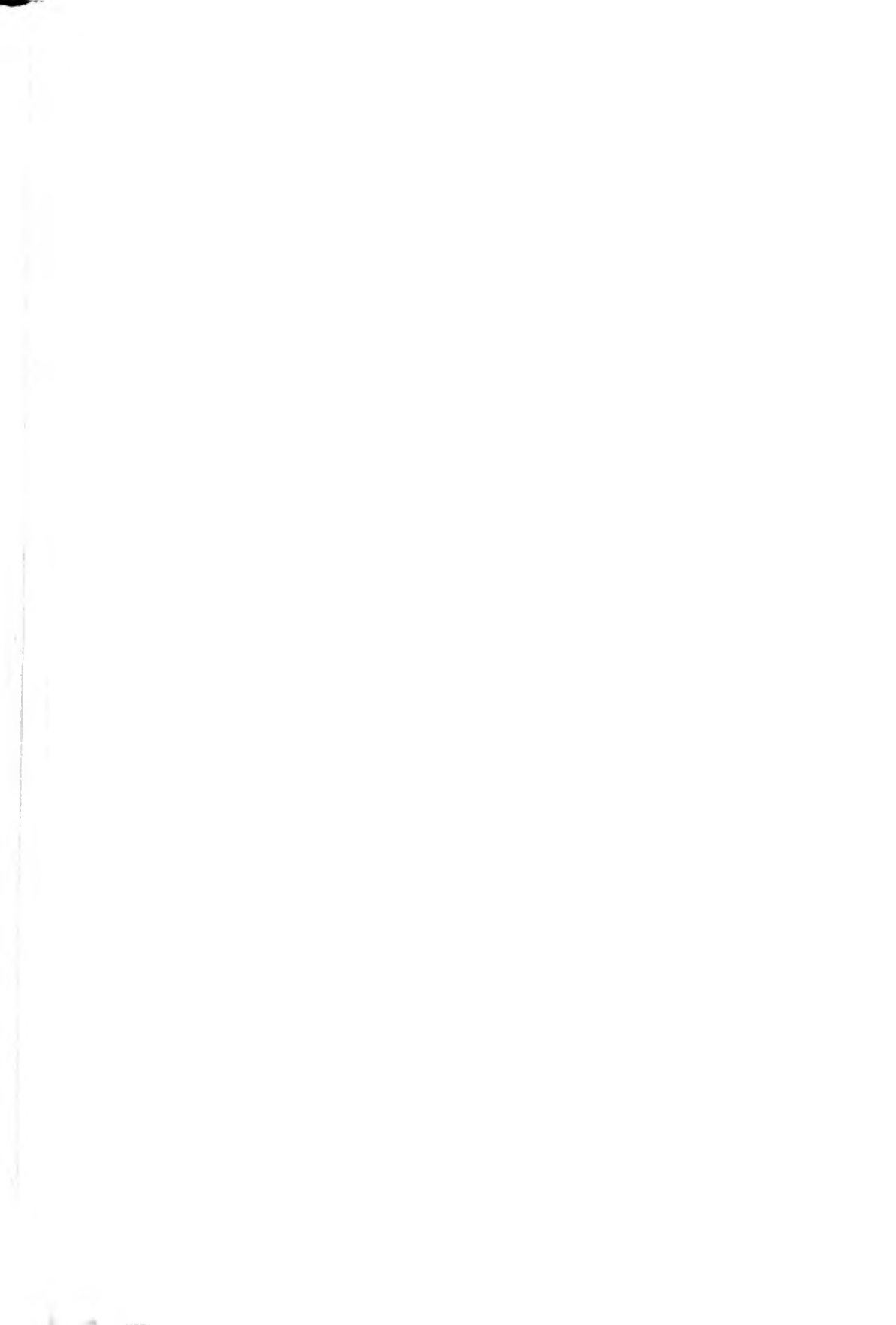


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

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